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A KEY TO THE BIBLE:

A

KEY TO THE BIBLE:

BEING

AN EXPOSITION

OF THE

History, Axioms, and General Laws

OF

SACRED INTERPRETATION.

BY

DAVID DOBIE.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."—2 Timothy, iii. 16.

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PREFACE.

THE want of such a treatise as is here presented to the Christian public, we have reason to believe, has been widely felt. The every-day reader of the Bible has sought for such a work, that, through its aid, he might become his own commentator, and possess within himself the means of understanding the difficult passages. The Bible-class teacher has desired it, as a reliable assistance in the work of interpretation; hoping that, with such a book, he might answer objections with greater readiness, and impress more permanently on the minds of his scholars, the important lessons of the word of God. The student for the ministry has inquired for it, fully persuaded that such a work must be to him one of the most useful of all works, in the prosecution of his studies, and in preparing himself for the active duties of the pulpit. The pastor, engaged in the daily business of expounding the Scriptures, has searched for it for his own profit, and as a safe and useful book to put into the hands of the younger members of his flock, and even into the hands of those who, through ignorance or opposition, are disposed to urge objections against the Bible. He has felt that such a book was better than a commentary for such purposes: more direct, more comprehensive, less occupied with details, and affording the very best means to honest inquirers

of satisfying themselves of the truth, and divine origin of the Scriptures.

There is certainly a scarcity of such books. It was during a search for such a help to the understanding of some of the more difficult passages, that the thought of its composition was at first suggested; and this thought, nourished by the kind words of a widely-distinguished friend and teacher of the science, has here found its expression. Since the design of its publication became known, we are encouraged to believe it will be received by not a few as a welcome assistance in the work of interpreting the Sacred Volume.

The book might have been made more scholastic in its plan and style, and more replete with sentences of Greek and Hebrew, but this would have defeated our design. It would have been repulsive to a great majority of those whom we desire to reach and benefit. The total value of such a book lies in its fitness to meet and satisfy popular wants.

It were a poor consolation to us, if this volume were adapted only to the tastes of the recluse, rather than the Sabbath-school teacher and the common reader of the Bible. There are already by far too many dry and learned text-books even in this department of sacred literature. It is quite time the science of Biblical interpretation, instead of retreating into theological halls, should come forth into the world, and make itself intelligible to the masses. It is none of our business to petrify exegesis. We would rather breathe into it the breath of life, and make it a living reality—a familiar and beloved science. Much rather would we write for all mankind than for any one class, however influential. What are the few to the many? That our pages may enlighten and interest all classes has been our honest desire.

We have written for all who read the Bible, and written that they may understand. For, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" is the main question with every man who handles the Word of God.

To read without understanding is surely labor without profit. But the necessity of right rules, and the relation they bear to a right comprehension of the Scriptures is not always realized nor admitted. Men read, and think they understand, when, in truth, they are but perverting the word of God.

Indeed, there is no book in existence which receives at the hands of its readers such various usage. Every man treats it in accordance with his character. There are those who never allow themselves to be anxious in respect to its meaning. Others view it simply as a text-book of their peculiar ideas, or of all contradictory and conflicting opinions. Some have no just conceptions of its unity; to them, it is a revelation in chaos, "without form, and void." Others regard it as any other human composition, which might be very much improved by the correcting hand of modern philosophy. Not a few flee to some favorite commentary, there to sacrifice the right of private judgment for the poor privilege of accepting the opinions of others, without knowing the grounds on which they rest. Many despair of any effective system of principles, under the belief that the Scriptures must needs be for ever involved in mystery, never to be explained. Others adopt an imperfect system, through the force of some fundamental error, or the influence of their religious leaders. And there are many who depend on the mere perusal of the Bible, saying, if its meaning cannot be ascertained in this natural and easy way, it cannot be ascertained at all.

But there is an unreasonableness on the face of all this. The best, if not also, the only method of ascertaining the sense of the Bible, is to follow a wise, and well-considered system of rules, such as common sense, in its final and just decisions, will justify. Even profound theologians, with all respect we write it, might reap no small advantage from adopting such a system. Says a writer in the Bibliotheca Sacra, for 1851, p. 218: "We have only to look into the writings of Pres. Edwards to see how much his acute and profound intellect would have been aided by better principles of interpreta-

tion." But if this is true of the greatest theologian, that this, or any other country has produced, since the days of Paul, how much more is it true of all his inferiors?

A book, from any source, that shall prove a real and reliable aid to the true interpretation of the Bible, having the marks of a cool and impartial judgment, and breathing the air of a calm independence, will be welcomed by all who interest themselves in the progress of the Gospel, in the enlightenment and salvation of the human race. In whatever measure we may have succeeded in the production of such a book, it may not be for us to say; but our hopes respecting the science itself, are kindred with those of its first patron and father in this country, the excellent Stuart. He says: "The hope may be rationally indulged, that at some future day, hermeneutics will be a science as definite, and as well discriminated as most other sciences, which have been long taught as complete."

Our grateful acknowledgments are due to the Rev. Edward Robinson, D.D., of Union Theological Seminary, New York, for his review of the general plan, and his cheerful approbation of the axioms, and general laws laid down in the work. To the Rev. H. D. Kitchel, of Detroit, our obligations are also many; both for his reading the MSS. with a brother's and a critic's eye, and for the genial words whereby he inspired us with the necessary courage to give our labors to the press.

PLATTSBURGH, *May*, 1856.

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KEY TO THE BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF A RIGHT INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Every age claims and exercises the privilege of writing its own books on all subjects, and especially its books on morals and religion. This privilege is essential to progress and to the full enjoyment of the truth in its best and most useful forms. When men cease to think for themselves, they soon sink into spiritual bondage, and descend from the position of honor and moral worth, to which the exercise of their just rights would naturally elevate them.

The only sure method of preventing this evil result, is to think and believe for ourselves, responsible to none, but God the Judge of all. The past has

no authority to bind the present age to the reception of its opinions; the present age best comports itself under its responsibilities, and renders truest reverence to the past, when it receives its creed on the ground of sober investigation and satisfactory conviction alone.

It is a vain expectation, therefore, which finds a place in some minds, that the books of the past, on religion and the Bible, should satisfy the people of this generation. To attain an enlightened satisfaction in our religious belief, we must investigate; and to investigate thoroughly and usefully, we must think for ourselves, in sincere and true independence. Every man is born to this responsibility; and happy are we in the conviction, that true religion, and its only true source, the Bible, can receive no harm from the legitimate exercise of human reason in its proper sphere. The free and wise use of reason is, to men, the infallible condition of all saving faith, and of all right acquaintance with the will of God; and to attain that acquaintance, is, in a high sense, the main business of every man in this life. We know of no business so noble in itself, or so worthy of the attention of all mankind. It is one of those duties which throw both a solemnity and a nobility around all the incidents and issues of man's life from first to last. To know the will of God, is next only in gran-

deur of privilege, and in true fitness to the happiness of the soul, to the cheerful and hearty performance of that will.

But for man to know the will of God, in its broadest and grandest sense, it is necessary that he should *search* the Scriptures; and every man to whom this matter is submitted, confesses to this necessity. The surest way to know the will of God is to make sure of the sense of the Bible.

No man, therefore, need marvel that there has been so much written respecting the meaning of the Bible, and the principles by which it is to be ascertained. In the Bible are settled all the profoundest problems of the soul. Here are solved all the urgent inquiries of our finite and restless nature. Here is garnered up that wisdom which is from Heaven, which alone becomes the immortal mind, and imparts to it that sublime peace, so essential to its progress and to its comfort in prospect of eternity.

To the Bible, above all other sources, must the friends of God and truth look for a final refutation of those errors, whereby Christianity, in every age, has been corrupted. In all religious controversies, in the controversy between the Jew and the Christian, between the Protestant and the Papist, between those who hold to regeneration in baptism, the saving grace of sacraments, the supremacy of bishops,

the simple humanity of Christ, the salvation of all men, the return of the Jews to Palestine, the personal appearance and reign of our Lord for a thousand years at Jerusalem, and those who deny these doctrines, a sound and irrefragable interpretation of the Bible, conducted in the legitimate use of reason, is the last court of appeal. "This is the Judge that ends the strife." This is the one mighty instrument by which error is to be overthrown; and the victory cannot be doubtful, for God is on the side of his Word.

Any one who will reflect upon the matter, cannot fail to perceive the importance of our subject. It is by a right interpretation of its contents that the Bible becomes to us, in effect, what it professes to be, the infallible Word of God. To ascertain the precise sense intended by the Spirit of God, neither adding thereto, nor subtracting therefrom, is the only sure way of possessing the Bible. Its claims, as inspired and supreme, the momentous topics on which it treats, our absolute need of it as a directory of life, indispensable in a very high degree to the salvation of the soul, are facts of themselves sufficient to show how important it is that we find and adopt its true sense only.

The foundation of theological seminaries—the required qualifications of their professors—the im-

mense sums laid out in their endowment—the princely libraries gathered for their use, show clearly what the Christian world thinks of the importance of a Bible rightly interpreted.

So indeed does the establishment of the Christian ministry, because mainly for this express purpose it is ordained and educated. The work of the ministry is first to ascertain, then to enforce the meaning of the Scriptures. It was during our own personal struggles after the sense of certain texts, that the importance of this whole subject, and the need of such a treatise as this, for the first time revealed itself. On more careful investigation, we found that the meaning of the text did not sustain the sermon, and therefore the sermon was in fact of no authority. To the minister of the Gospel, above all men, the right interpretation of the Bible is a matter of the greatest importance. It is only when his sermon is wedded to his text, by a clear and irresistible interpretation, that he speaks in the name of his Master; and when he thus speaks, he will be heard and reverenced as an ambassador of Christ, a veritable teacher of the Word of God.

Besides, a misinterpreted Bible is the stronghold of all error—of Judaism as well as of Popery. The Talmud on which the Jews rely for their creed, is merely a collection of misinterpretations of Moses

and the prophets. Nor is there any general conversion of the Jews to be expected until they are persuaded to abandon the Talmud and take the Bible of their fathers in its stead. The same thing is true of Popery in all its forms. A perverted Bible, in the hands of a selfish priesthood, is the right arm of the Greek and Roman churches; and if, as the friends of the Gospel, we would secure them to the true faith, we must ply them on every hand with the Word of God. But in this work it will not be sufficient to quote Scripture; we must interpret Scripture; and that, too, on principles, which their reason will compel them to accept; then we may hope to enlighten and reclaim them, but not till then.

It gives all the force of a divine affirmation to the importance which we attach to a right interpretation of the Bible, when we refer to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. He addressed himself throughout his whole eventful ministry to this very undertaking. The Scribes and Pharisees had made the Word of no effect through their traditions—that is, through their false interpretations. Hence our Lord attacked and subverted the entire system of Pharasaic exegesis. He exposed their errors and vindicated the true sense of the Scripture on every fitting occasion. The apostles imbibed the spirit of their divine Master, and carried it out in all their

labors and writings, until the volume of Revelation was closed.

Finally, history confirms all that we have said of the importance of a right interpretation. The Bible, read and understood in its own meaning, in all climes and ages, is the sure forerunner of undefiled religion, the fruitful germ of all greatness and growth, in individuals and in nations. The Bible, the divine book, not on the shelf as an ornament, not in morocco and gold clasps merely, with a cross on the outside to be admired—but revealed and written on the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit, and received as an infallible standard of faith and morals—this, has always proved the true reformer. Under its influence, every faculty of man, and every virtue of the soil on which he treads, has ripened rapidly to maturity. A rightly interpreted Bible is the only pure fountain of saving knowledge and healthful civilization in this sinful and wretched world.

A firm faith in these sentiments has inspired us throughout in the composition of this work, of the special design of which we now proceed more particularly to speak.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPECIAL DESIGN OF THIS TREATISE.

To ascertain the true sense of the Bible has always been a matter of the profoundest interest to all devout minds. Hence books on the subject, expounding the principles of interpretation, and showing how the difficult passages of Scripture are to be explained, have always been desired. The want of such books has been felt by the learned and the unlearned, by enemies as well as by friends of the Sacred Volume; and the common method of meeting it has been by commentaries in full on the books of the Bible.

But such commentaries, almost without exception, have been too elaborate, and too wearisome, to be thoroughly read; and they very often fail to explain the difficulties which the reader wishes to have explained. It is no part of their design to state, with any clearness, the principles on which their exposi-

tions proceed; and yet there is not one in twenty of common readers but wishes to know those principles. Hence although commentaries are extensively purchased, they do not prove wholly satisfactory in the interpretation of the Bible.

The special design of this book is to place the principles of interpretation in the reader's own hands, that he may employ them in the formation of his views of what the Bible means; if he acquires the principles, he can interpret, and form his own creed and commentary, in the free exercise of his own judgment.

That there are principles by which all our interpretations should be governed, will not be denied; although it is well understood there are objections urged in high places against all attempts at reducing them to a system. It is said, men interpret as they read, without waiting for any formal system of rules. But if this is even so, it is no proof that men interpret correctly. A correct system of logic is no hindrance to correct thinking. Even so in the case before us. If there be fundamental principles of interpretation, and no one denies it, and if they can be expressed and classified, the expression and classification of them must be a real assistance to every student of the Sacred Volume. The want of such a system, and the inconsistent methods of interpreta-

tion to which it leads, has wrought no good to religion. It has given birth to the proverb, as mischievous as it is untrue:

> "In the Bible every man his opinion seeks;
> In the Bible every man his opinion finds."

This is a libel on the Bible. Let sound and true principles be adopted, and this proverb will perish. The Bible can be interpreted consistently with itself, and in such a manner as to commend itself to the good sense and enlightened faith of all men. It is not the text-book of every error with which this world is infested. It can be correctly interpreted, so as to give unity and perspicuity to its doctrines, just as truly as the ocean can be traversed by the help of the compass, through all its gulfs, bays, and straits.

It is absurd to oppose the reduction of interpretation to a science with its fixed rules. In the very nature of a revelation, and indeed of every communication from one intelligent being to another, there must be things requiring explanation; but he to whom the communication is made must have the key to its meaning, or else it is given to him in vain. His knowledge of language, of the subject, of the author, of himself, and of things without him, will come to his aid. He will avail himself of the laws

of correct thinking; and these are precisely the laws which, when classified, will serve all the purposes of a rational and right system of Biblical interpretation. Our design is to collect these laws, and illustrate their application in the actual work of finding the true sense of the Scriptures.

But we do not think it necessary to follow the method of some who have treated this subject in all its details. They have laid down rules for all the separate departments of Scriptures; for the parables, the promises, and the types, &c., until we have felt oppressed with the idea that the whole subject is entangled in an endless mass of particulars, never to be mastered. Even for professed students we would not adopt this method. It throws an air of difficulty over a subject, which in truth is of more easy comprehension than many of the sciences, the approach to which has never been hedged up with any such obstructions.

We have not attempted, therefore, any exhausting system of particulars; our aim has been to deal with the subject in a clear yet comprehensive manner, laying down only those general principles which solve rationally and satisfactorily the main difficulties in the way of the inquirer. The wonderful unanimity of the great mass of common readers of the Bible, in respect to its meaning, shows that by

far the greater part of the Bible admits of no misunderstanding, and calls for no laborious apparatus of interpretation. We do not say the Bible contains no difficulties, nor that its interpretation is a work requiring no profound attention. What we object to is the air of repulsiveness and immensity so unnecessarily cast upon the subject. Let the student have the ordinary encouragement held out to those who attempt the acquisition of other sciences. Let him not be plunged into a wilderness of particulars. If he must have helps to interpretation, let them be such as he needs, such as he can readily use. A traveller asking the way to a certain place, does not require a minute description of every object on the line of his journey. It is enough that you call his attention to the most obvious objects: thus directed, he will find his way without further trouble.

Most frankly, therefore, is the confession here made, that this is no exhausting system of hermeneutics. Those who have a taste for such works will find it gratified in Ernesti, Horne, and Davidson; invaluable books if you wish to pursue the subject into all its details. We must walk in another path, less scholastic, leading through an opener country; content, if we may conduct the humblest inquirers to an understanding of the Bible, by such means only as shall neither weary their minds with particu-

lars, nor divert them from the work of an independent interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

A correct and comprehensive system of principles must be a very welcome assistance to all readers and students of the Sacred Volume; and such a system it has been our aim to construct. If the principles here recorded are in themselves correct, their application, such as we have made it, we hope is also correct. On this point there may be a difference of opinion. Some may adopt the principles, and object to the use we have made of them. But we are not greatly moved at the thought. Our eye is single. Truth is our aim; and if the principles we have laid down in this volume be founded in sound common sense, the illustrations will answer for themselves. Let the truth be spoken at all hazards. All sects and parties are probably somewhat in the wrong, as respects the meaning of the Bible; but the principles of interpretation, like the principles of mathematics, are independent of all schools and parties; and by their impartial, legitimate application, must all parties be reproved if they have adopted errors worthy of reproof. We subject ourselves to the same laws, and await the issue without fear.

To every honest inquirer, then, is this treatise commended. If it serve the purpose designed by the author, it will be a key to the Bible, and an easy

and convenient help in the solution of many of the perplexities which, as trials of our faith and patience, God has suffered to gather around His Word. May the blessing of Him in whose fear it has been written, go with the book in all its fortunes, and it shall not be sent forth in vain.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE HISTORY AND PROGRESS OF INTERPRETATION.

THE interpretation of the Bible has had a history and a progress very similar to that of every other science. The time has been when its laws were but very imperfectly understood; and when principles were advanced and followed, which in our day would be regarded as unsound in the highest degree. Evidence of this meets us at the very threshold of this history. Among many of the discoveries that give you pain in regard to the early condition of Christianity, there is none more painful than this, that almost contemporaneously with the apostles themselves, there appears a disposition to pervert the plainest portions of the Bible. Instead of taking the obvious sense, the leading early writers, whose works have come down to us, seem to labor with all their ingenuity to invent a meaning as far as possible from it.

To go no further back than A. D. 200, Clemens Alexandrinus gives the following rules for the interpretation of the Bible: 1. All Scripture has an allegorical sense. 2. The laws of Moses have a fourfold meaning. 3. Every law of Moses foretells something future. 4. The Scriptures conceal their meaning, that we may the more diligently study them; and that men may be convinced that they did not foreknow the coming of the Messiah. 5. The literal sense of Scripture produces only elementary faith, while the allegorical leads to the most sublime wisdom. 6. Tradition is an indispensable light in interpretation.

Such were the laws of exegesis adopted and applied by this eminent Christian teacher; and yet not one of them deserves to be styled a law of interpretation. In his Stromata, or Miscellanies, may be found abundant illustrations of the errors to which they led. Clemens was an ardent disciple of Plato, and the philosophy of that mystical but eloquent Greek controlled all his views of the Word of God.

After Clemens came Iræneus and Tertullian, who are properly ranked together, because they adopted the same principles, and labored to refute the same great errors of the Gnostics. The Gnostics were the Rationalists of those early centuries. They opposed their reason to the explicit dicta of the Scriptures,

and carried the allegorizing method of Clemens to such a length, that in the opinion of Iræneus, Tertullian, and others, the whole fabric of Christianity was in danger of being subverted. To counteract the mischief, these fathers insisted chiefly on one principle, which seemed indeed their only principle for all the purposes of interpretation. This they styled "regula fidei," the rule of faith, *the creed of the Church.* Tertullian gave all his vigor to the establishment of this vicious dogma. He was by far the most eloquent of all the Latin fathers, and his writings, on fire now with true fervor, can be read to this day profitably, for their literary merits alone. Though he adheres to the literal sense as supreme, he is willing to renounce reason altogether, and believe all the more firmly whatever it declared incredible. From him we have this pithy sentence: "A fault in interpretation is not of less magnitude than a fault in the life." But his influence, on the whole, was very decidedly opposed to the simplicity and purity of the Gospel. A corrupt traditionary faith was put in the place of the inspired Word of God.

In the third century, Origen, laborious, acute, and a great admirer of Plato, was the centre of Biblical learning. He adopted Plato's idea, that man consists of three elements, body, soul, and spirit; and on this

theory he maintained that Scripture must have a three-fold sense. Consequently, the grand feature of his system, was the setting aside of the obvious meaning as nearly always worthless. And hence the absurdities of this learned father are all but incredible. Notwithstanding his system held a long and mighty sway; and while tracing its history, we have again and again reached the conviction, that it became one of those wide-spread and potent causes, which, working in harmony with the depraved passions of men, finally produced the great apostasy of Rome. The entire Bible was perverted. In the hands of Origen and his disciples, it became an overflowing fountain of foolish conceits, having no power over the hearts of men. The uncircumcised philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, was preferred to the teachings of Paul and John. The light of God's Word was quenched in a heathen effort to make it consistent with heathen reasoning. The Bible was no longer in its own sovereignty, the all-sufficient standard of faith and practice. There was authority only in the teachings of those who controlled the Church. Tradition—and such tradition, as forced a three-fold sense on the Bible—was the rule of interpretation, and the law of all doctrine. See Mosheim's Com. vol. II. p. 172–189. Origen did indeed sometimes contravene his own false principles; but his errors pre-

vailed, and their reign was a reign of death to the simplicity, and power of the sacred Scriptures.

Next after Origen, Augustine is the first great name that offers itself to our attention. He was the great man of his age, and in exegesis, the greatest that had yet appeared in the Christian Church. In his work on Christian doctrine, he has laid down better rules than any preceding writer, though they are exceedingly defective, and in his actual interpretations, egregiously violated. The common method of turning every passage into allegory, held dominion over his otherwise noble and independent mind. Witness his interpretation (Evan. quæst. lib. 2, quæst 19), of Luke x. 30, the parable of the good Samaritan. He says the man is Adam, in the human race; Jericho is the moon; the robbers are Satan and his angels; the inn is the Church, &c. Many other examples could be given, but let this suffice.

In his treatise on Christian doctrine, above mentioned, he specifies the following as rules of interpretation. 1. The nature of the passage is carefully to be ascertained, whether it is literal, or figurative. 2. Obscure places are to be interpreted by the more intelligible. 3. Nothing hinders the same passage to be understood in more senses than one. 4. A knowledge of tropes is necessary. 5. Human reason is not to be trusted.

This series of maxims, for they have not the form of laws of exegesis, shows that science had occupied the thoughts of this prince among theologians. But on referring to his actual interpretations, we do not find him obeying his own principles; and the conviction is ever growing upon us, that had he elaborated a more rational system of principles, he would have been a more consistent expounder of the Bible, and a more judicious teacher of its doctrines. A man of limited education, of high natural endowments, and unquenchable enthusiasm, he was often more ready to make the Scriptures bend to his philosophy, or to the creed of the Church, than meekly to inquire on sound principles for the meaning of the Scriptures. But in this respect he was like all the Fathers. They all stumbled at one stumbling stone, the neglect of the plain and obvious sense of the Bible, and the abuse of the reason with which God had endowed them.

We cannot mention all the names of those, who, in those early centuries, after Augustine, appeared as interpreters of the Scriptures; neither is it necessary; for they walk in one well-beaten path. With unvarying uniformity, they laid great stress on tradition as essential to the right understanding of the Bible. But in the course of time, very naturally, it came to pass, that men began to be desirous of know-

ing with greater precision the limits of this tradition, and the exact amount of its teachings. Accordingly, a record of its teachings was made and published; and by a singular felicity, this collection of opinions was styled Catenæ, *the chains;* because, as it was alleged, it contained a continuous chain of doctrine and belief, from the apostles downward.

But now, that tradition was written, it was maintained that "the chains," were preferable to the Scriptures, because while the Scriptures were difficult to be understood, "the chains" were easy. To this sentiment, the position was also added, that the Scriptures could be understood only by the priests; and for reasons not difficult for us to understand, even at this distance of time, the priests piously recommended "the chains" in place of the Bible. The consequences could not be doubtful. The Bible was totally shorn of its power, and robbed of all the honor that belonged to it. It was all but quenched out.

From all the investigations we have been able to make of the writings and influence of the Fathers, as they have been called, we have no hesitation in saying, that the principles they adopted in the exposition of the Bible, were such as common sense cannot justify, and such therefore as led them headlong into the grossest errors. They possessed, but they, at the

same time grievously perverted, the Holy Oracles; and this fact, melancholy, as it is undisputed, only shows with what vigilance we should watch over our principles of Biblical interpretation. Had the early Fathers proved faithful to their trust, and adhered honestly to the dictates of common sense, in the great work of explaining and defending the Word of God, how different had been the history of the Church, and the world! A departure once made from the simplicity of the Bible, in the direction of priestly power and mysticism, how sudden and dreadful were the aberrations from the safe paths of pure and undefiled religion! What horrible ages of darkness were entailed upon the Church, and upon mankind, by the agency of the leading teachers of religion! ages whose darkness and miseries have not passed away to this day.

From Augustine to the fourteenth century there is a wide and dreary waste in Biblical learning. Not a treatise of any real value, through all that long period of a thousand years, offers itself to our attention. The human mind was bound fast in "the chains" of tradition. The Fathers were supposed to have exhausted all Biblical knowledge, and woe to the man who dared to say they had not. The Bible was an unknown book; its study was wholly neglected. The highest intellectual effort of Biblical

students was making "chains" out of "chains," traditions out of traditions. It was the hour of darkness. Satan held a jubilee.

The first name that gives promise of a better day, is that of Nicholas de Lyra, 1340; of whom Luther said:

> "If Lyra had not harped,
> Luther had not danced."

Lyra was a good Hebrew scholar—a rare attainment in those days; and gave all his vigor to the study and illustration of the Bible. His greatest work was a commentary on the whole Scriptures, and in the prologues prefixed, we meet with some of the soundest views ever advanced in respect to the science of interpretation. But "the chains" had even fallen upon him. "I protest," he said, "that I intend nothing, either in the way of assertion or determination, except in reference to points clearly settled by Scripture, or the authority of the Church. All beside must be taken as written scholastically and by the way of exercise; for I submit all I have said, and am to say, to the correction of our holy mother the Church."

These were the last dying notes of the old hymn of spiritual servility. Luther arose and struck the first effectual blow for liberty. He gave the Bible to his country in their mother tongue, and the science

of interpretation began. As we have just said, De Lyra pointed to the sound and reliable principles of the science, and Luther's admiration of them gave promise of the correctness of his own. On Gen. i. 9, he says of Lyra: "Ego Lyranum ideo amo, et inter optimos pono, quod ubique diligenter detinet et persequitur historiam, quanquam patrum se vinci patitur." "I love Lyra, and place him among the very best interpreters; because, though he permits himself to be led away by the Fathers, he always diligently retains and follows the historical sense."

Luther, for the first time, introduced the idea of a direct appeal to the Bible, rightly interpreted, as the standard of sound doctrine. The Fathers and the chains were both disowned; to the law and the testimony, if they spake not according to these, it was because there was no truth in them. It was full time that the Bible should be heard on its own behalf. The appeal, therefore, was to the Word of God impartially explained. In this lay the germ of that mighty revolution, which, having its origin in the depths of Germany, and its life in the Scriptures, is destined to enlighten the whole world, and enthrone the Bible in the hearts of all nations. The reformers had the advantage of their opponents, in the mere quoting of the Scriptures. The advocates of the Church could not stand before them. With

hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit, the common people understood the Word of God, and verified the saying of the Great Teacher: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

But the book, which deserves the first place among those of this famous period, in which the science of exegesis was well set forth, though not strictly a treatise on interpretation, was the justly-celebrated "Institutes" of John Calvin. This great work made its mark upon the literature of the age and of the world; because it was a well-reasoned statement of Christian doctrine, drawn by correct logic from the Bible. It laid the immovable platform of Protestantism on the firm basis of the Bible, where it will ever remain. On the whole, Calvin was one of the wisest interpreters of the Scriptures that had as yet appeared, from the days of the apostles.

The science, however, was not yet perfected. In the seventeenth century the idea was still predominant that the Bible was replete with allegory. 'Every passage of Scripture looks every way, and all the meaning that can be found in it, is in it to be regarded as the mind of God." This theory greatly prevailed in England, and over all the continent of Europe. Among other evidences, witness John Bunyan's "Solomon's Temple Spiritualized."

In Germany, the birth-place of the Reformation,

there now arose a succession of writers on Biblical science, in learning, industry, and boldness, far surpassing their predecessors. Some were friends, some enemies of the Bible; but never before was the critical and exegetical study of the Scriptures so ardently pursued; with what results is yet to be seen. The leaders, and the prominent points of their systems, we here briefly mention.

First is Emmanuel Kant, a professor of metaphysics. His grand principle was to educe from the Bible only such sentiments as are conformable to pure morality. "Pure reason" was the test of Scripture. Whatever did not agree with that test was rejected, and consequently the fact of inspiration was speedily ignored. The Bible came to have no more authority than any other human composition. It is due to Kant, nevertheless, to say that he did not avow these as the legitimate consequences of his theory.

After him came Eichhorn and Paulus, holding only another phase of his mischievous dogma. They taught that the miracles of Scripture were to be received only when they could not be referred to probable causes. But probable causes were always plenty, and consequently not a miracle was left ere long to bear witness for the truth. For a time this was quite a popular theory.

Semler next propounded his method. He started with the proposition that Christ and his disciples were truly benevolent persons; but in view of the superstitions of the age, they accommodated their teachings to the ignorance around them. They knew the truth, but did not reveal it, for fear of offending men, and driving them from instruction altogether. The Bible, therefore, was only a pious imposition on the credulity of the world. What a view to take of the Word of God!

Thus there arose in the heart of Christendom what has been falsely called Rationalism, a system in which the Bible was treated with all manner of abuse and insult, under the name of reason and learning. In opposition to this Rationalism, another class of mistaken interpreters stood forth—the Pietists. They occupied the other extreme, decrying reason wholly, and depending on the special impulses of the Spirit for the discovery of the true meaning of Scripture. Learning and reason were not helps in their view, but hindrances. It was to be expected that this party should soon run into the wildest enthusiasm: the Bible was neglected by them, quite as much as it was perverted by their opponents.

In 1643, the Westminster Assembly in England did good service to the cause of sound interpretation, by their Confession of Faith, which, with some few

exceptions, is perhaps the most correct and consistent system of evangelical doctrine in the world. It proceeds throughout on the ground that the Bible is supreme in authority, and its contents to be interpreted in dependence on the Spirit of God, on principles of sound common sense. The process by which their celebrated confession was made, was a process purely of interpretation, because at every step the question with that learned assembly was, What saith the Scripture?

The next great step in the history of our science was the Commentary of Matthew Henry, who brought a sanctified and childlike mind to his work. Then came Philip Doddridge, the Melanchthon of England, with polished pen, unfolding the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. In Scotland, a few years later, John Brown sent forth the self-interpreting Bible, which holds its place among books to this day. He was a self-taught and sagacious expounder of the Bible, and did much to revive a true and independent exposition of the Scriptures. He published a series of rules, which will be found in the appendix to this treatise; they convey some idea of the condition of this science in his day.

Many names now crowd upon us, but we forbear. The rebellion against the Fathers was bearing fruit. The Bible was fast regaining its supremacy, despite

the efforts of Rome; and the pride of that hierarchy was rebuked, for the common people not only read, but understood the Sacred Oracles without the aid of "the chains." Not that past systems had yet wholly lost their power. Plato, Augustine, Calvin, the mighty minds of former ages, were not so easily vanquished. The Fathers had yet a wide dominion. Systems of erroneous philosophy, by nature, subtle as the air we breathe, are all but immortal; perhaps they never altogether die. As we approach, however, our own times, there is more liberty, more simplicity, more progress in the direction of a sound interpretation.

In this country, powerful revivals of religion, long and keen controversies, Sabbath-school instruction, and the spirit of missions, have had a wonderful effect. Improvements in natural science also, the defeat of infidelity in Europe, and the successful refutation of its objections against the Scriptures, have all served to throw new light on our science. The names of those who have labored directly for its advancement here, are few in number, but of proved energy and worth. First, stands that of Moses Stuart; a man of sincere heart, great enthusiasm, and indomitable perseverance. He was the father of the science in this country, and led the way in its study, with such zeal, that even Germany confessed itself

interested. The cautious mind of New England was alarmed, and Old England, even when it could not agree, was willing to applaud. His conclusions are not always so confidently to be relied on as those of others, who have come after him; but as a student of the original languages, and an independent expounder of the Sacred Oracles, he has had, as yet, few superiors. Safer guides to the arcana of the Scriptures have arisen; but none so ardent, or so chivalrous, as he. The greater part of the helps to Biblical study, in this country, are the creation of his hand. To him, therefore, belongs the double honor of advancing this sacred science, beyond all former precedent, on this continent, and of producing in great measure, the very facilities by which it has been so successfully prosecuted.

Next in time and honor stands Edward Robinson; a riper scholar, gifted with more sagacity, and more of that comprehensive erudition, so essential to the Biblical interpreter. His labors have been chiefly in the department of sacred geography and lexicography, and to every student of the Sacred Scriptures, they are beyond all price. The principles on which he has compiled his "Lexicon of the New Testament," and by which he was governed also, in his edition of "Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon," are in themselves good evidence of the great progress made in the science

of Scriptural exegesis. They embrace the entire subject of exposition and bear the impress of sound, enlightened reason, against which there is no successful opposition.

Our limits do not permit us to speak of the labors of Gibbs, Alexander, Hodge, Sears, Conant, and others, who have contributed nobly to the advancement of this science. It is a field that admits of many laborers; and all these as critics and scholars, have deserved well of the friends of the Bible.

Finally, as worthy of being numbered with the first three, we now record the name of a Presbyterian pastor, who, amid the labors of a city ministry, has earned for his country the proud distinction of having given to the world, the most clear, satisfactory, and practical expositions of many of the sacred books that have ever been written. Simplicity and directness are his characteristics. He is the fairest, the most impartial, and the most instructive of all commentators. Pledged to no master, a slave to no school, but using a cool and sound judgment, he has developed the meaning of the inspired writers, in a popular manner, with more success than any other writer of his day. The Notes of Albert Barnes, though not written for scholars, have done noble service in the department of Biblical interpretation. Never again will "the chains" fetter the free expo-

sition of the Word of God. They are broken asunder for ever. Henceforth the Bible must be interpreted on sound and self-evident principles, such as are consistent with immutable truth. The true point of approach to the sense of Scripture is not through the question, "What saith the Church, or the creed?" but through the question, "What saith, and what meaneth the Word of God?" The grand characteristic of Barnes, which in due time will become the characteristic of the age, consists in seizing the object of the inspired penmen, and in giving a calm, rational, and self-consistent explication of their doctrines, on principles which commend themselves to the common sense of men. It is on this ground that the Bible will survive and retain its hold on the human mind, and fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters fill the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

ARGUMENT FOR THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE STATED.

It is not absolutely essential in a treatise on the principles of interpretation, that we should enter elaborately into the proof of the fact that the Scriptures are inspired. In such a treatise, that fact may properly be taken for granted. Yet it may serve a very important purpose, at least, to state the argument for inspiration, by way of laying the foundation of some of those maxims, on which the whole process of interpretation is based. If it be a fact, that the Bible is inspired of God, it certainly must behoove us to keep the fact constantly in view, as affecting our decisions at every step. To lose sight of it or to deny it, must compel us to err fundamentally.

Here let us first define what is meant by the inspiration of the Bible. In asserting that the Bible is inspired, we mean to assert the presence and watchful superintendence of the Divine Spirit, in the

minds of the writers, to such a degree as best to secure the statement of truth, of truth in many instances, which lay beyond the discovery of the human mind. The writers of the Scriptures wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God.

That such inspiration was possible no man can reasonably deny. No higher power is required in the case, than in the creation and support of the human mind in the free exercise of its powers.

That such inspiration was necessary to the existence and authority of such a book as the Bible, is evident from the nature of the doctrines it contains; the comparative ignorance of the writers in respect to natural science; and the importance of its standing forth in all generations, not as the production of men, but as the authoritative Word of God. Without such inspiration it had lacked certainty, dignity, and power. It would have occupied no higher place than the Koran, and possessed no higher adaptation to the wants of the universal human mind. It would not have been the word of God. But as it is, whether we read its histories, or its descriptions of God, of nature, and of man; or its laws of morals, its plan of salvation, and its means of renewing the soul in the pure image of God; or its deep mysteries of blessedness yet to be developed in the coming cycles of eternity, we can neither deny, nor cease to feel its heavenly

origin. The inspiration and presence of the Almighty goes with it; and such was His sovereign, all-wise decree. Hence neither the comparative ignorance of the writers, nor the treacherousness of memory, nor imperfections of the understanding, availed to defeat the divine purpose. The inspiration of the Spirit is the strength of the Bible. But for this, it never could have survived, as it has done, on the rough seas of time; long ere this it had been destroyed in the desperate madness of men. God is in the Bible, and therefore its noblest triumphs are yet to come, in the histories of that millenium, so near at hand.

The argument, by which the fact of inspiration is conclusively established, is brief.

First is the consideration, that known things are everywhere spoken of in the Scriptures, just as we know them. The visible kingdom of nature is there reflected as in a mirror. The evidence for the attributes and character of God is there as correctly detailed, as in the material world. The word and the works are in most singular harmony. So also in respect to the character of man. Everything is set forth concerning the human heart, just as it works itself out in the every-day experience and business of life. There is no denying the correctness of the record, without at the same time denying the every-day history of the world.

Next is the fact, that the moral code of the Bible is such as proves it divine; it is so perfect, so admirable in its effects on the soul, so completely beyond the inventive powers of mere men, that it were a miracle more difficult to be accounted for than inspiration itself, were such a code found in a book of mere human origin. By whom, if not by the Spirit of God, could such an instrument as the moral law have been produced? In that golden law, so peculiarly the Bible's own, and so charmingly interwoven into the texture of its every page, in that law so august, so level to man's capacities, so worthy of Heaven, we cannot but behold the sure symbol of divinity.

Not to be omitted, is the wonderful harmony throughout the Book in respect to scientific truth. The writers, though profoundly ignorant, in a majority of instances, of all the natural sciences, have never in any case contradicted them. Here is certainly the finger of God. Has not every other book pretending to be a revelation, disproved its own pretences, in this very particular?

Then further, the writers living thousands of years apart, under very different degrees of light, with very diverse endowments as men, have not in any instance set themselves in opposition to each other. Is this true of any other class of religious writers? Is it true of the poets, the philosophers, historians, or of

any of the admirers of the exact sciences, who say, "figures cannot lie"? But it is true of the writers of the Bible, and they wrote history, and poetry, and philosophy, and natural theology, and theories of civil and moral government, like other men; with this difference, that while other men never have agreed, the writers of the Bible have never failed to agree. The reason of this fact, is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is evidence to the same point, that not one of the writers of the Bible allows himself to be carried away with the belief of the common superstitions of the world. Superstition is the opposite of religion; hence, from first to last, the penmen of the Bible, being friends of religion, and under the superintendence of God, have not shown a trace of faith in any of the prevalent fooleries of witchcraft, and consultation of spirits. How did this come to pass, but from the fact that God was with them of a truth?

Once more. The writers of the Bible have agreed in publishing, with perfect harmony, many doctrines in their very nature, beyond the capacity of the unassisted human mind to have originated; such as the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the atonement of Christ, the regeneration of the heart by the Spirit, the penalty of the moral law, and the three-fold dis-

tinctions in the Godhead. It was not in the power of the human mind to have thought out these doctrines, nor was it possible, without the intervention of the Spirit, that so many writers should have spoken so uniformly in harmony respecting these doctrines, especially when speaking at such distances of time, and under such very diverse conditions of life.

Then further, it is to be noted, that in confirmation of these truths, signs, and wonders, and miracles were performed, such as God only can perform, and such as were never performed but in support of these same truths. Of these miracles, there can be no doubt, for they changed the history of the world, having been wrought in presence of thousands, with that express object in view. Among these miracles, we include prophecy, and confidently make our appeal to it, as to an irresistible demonstration of the presence of God with the writers of the Bible. Desperate, and frequent were the efforts of men to overthrow both the prophet and his vision; but sent of God, and speaking as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, he stood calmly at his post, until the time of the fulfillment came; then men saw and believed that God was with him.

Another proof of inspiration, is the peculiar and admirable effect of the Bible, on the mental, moral

and social, as well as intellectual condition of men. In this dark, sinful, and miserable world, it is at all times, and in every place, as an angel of God. The Bible is man's best friend—his best guide through life, his faithful attendant and comforter at the solemn hour of death. It is the enlightener of nations; the source of all human progress; the fountain of light, and joy, and hope to the world. There is no clearer evidence than this, that it is from God. It is the only true and great Reformer of the hearts and lives of men.

Finally, let us hear the testimony of the writers themselves. They are competent to testify on this point until their veracity is impeached. In 2 Pet. i. 28, one thus bears witness: "The Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." In Luke i. 70, another testifies: "As he spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began." In Heb. i. 1, a third declares the inspiration both of the Old Testament, and the New, as follows: "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." And in 2 Tim. iii. 16, the same writer, with more explicitness still, has said: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" words these, worthy of being written in gold, and placed as a frontispiece to every copy of the Bible sent forth into the world.

By this testimony of the writers, we are conducted to the same conclusion, in which we felt constrained to rest after a survey of the truth, purity, peculiarity, sublimity, and harmony of the Scriptures. Thus by their own merits, and by miracles, and by the explicit testimony of the writers, the Scriptures are proved, not the work of mere men but of the Holy spirit of God.

We have often felt that this whole question of inspiration might be settled by an appeal to a single book, the Revelation of John. It was composed in all probability, in his ninety-sixth, or ninety-seventh year. He made no pretensions to learning; his life was spent in the most humble circumstances, far from the walks of learning. Was it possible for such an aged man, in such a situation, to have written such a book by the energy of his own mind? Examine its contents; its plan, its awful sublimity of diction, its consistency, amid such intricacy, its grandeur of conception, its predictions stretching down through all time, fulfilling and being fulfilled with such wonderful accuracy—do this, with your eye

on the history of the Church and of the world since the day the book was written, and on the character of the man, standing as he did on the verge of his hundredth year—and say, did not John write as he was moved by the Spirit of God? If John so wrote, so wrote they all.

Ex uno disce omnes.

CHAPTER V.

AXIOMS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

Every science has its Axioms, or first principles, deemed *worthy* of being laid deep at its very basis; and as we claim for Biblical interpretation the dignity of a science, it is but proper that first of all, we should lay down some of those preliminary and fundamental facts on which it rests. That we should both determine what these axioms are, and record them, is as essential to consistency, as to correctness in the great work before us.

AXIOM. I.

The Bible was written under the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If it should be objected that this is not of the nature of a self-evident position, we reply, it is a position fully proved, and therefore in the very nature of the

case, it is the foundation principle of this science. The fact of inspiration is connected with every sentence of the Bible, and hence we record it properly as our first axiom. It must be disproved before it can be displaced.

AXIOM II.

In all its communications the Bible has one meaning to convey, and no more.

It was the denial of this axiom which led the Fathers into so many perversions of the Scriptures. Much of the error in Germany at this day, is traceable to the same source. It is common there for preachers to explain their text in its grammatical, historical, and doctrinal sense; as though the Scripture had not one, but three meanings, all distinct, and all true! And to the same mistake it is owing that many insist upon, what they call, the double sense of prophecy. But beyond all doubt, the law imposed by our Lord on His disciples, "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil," is the law of every inspired communication to man. There can be no violation of this precept on the part of the Spirit of God.

AXIOM III.

As one necessary condition of a revelation was that it should be made in human language; therefore the Bible being so given, can be understood by all for whom it was intended. It is an intelligible book, and open to all the world.

AXIOM IV.

Although the words in which the Bible is written be such only as men use in the daily intercourse of life, yet none the less are they such as God aptly chose, as the all-sufficient vehicles of His truth, and will, to men.

The choice of words we regard as a very important part of a revelation; and those who call in question the fitness or sufficiency of the words, know not what they do. A wrong word conveys a wrong meaning; but the best words were selected, as it is written, Ps. xii. 6, "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in the furnace of earth, purified seven times;" and 1 Cor. ii. 13, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth."

AXIOM V.

There is a strict doctrinal agreement among all the writers of the Bible, secured by the inspiring guidance of the Spirit. Mistakes of copiers and interpolations are of course excepted, if such there be. It is probable there are such mistakes, but they must be proved, before they can be admitted, to invalidate our maxim.

AXIOM VI.

The doctrinal agreement between the writers of the Bible, is in the sense, and not in the mere words employed.

The reason is obvious. Words are simply signs of ideas, and, from the frequency and caprice of their use, they often express ideas the very opposite of those for which they usually stand. It is very common for men to say in words the very opposite of what they intend. Our axiom is that the sacred writers agree in sense, though not in words.

AXIOM VII.

As every writer of the Bible is in harmony as respects his meaning, with the others; so, is he always in harmony with himself.

AXIOM VIII.

Between the statements of the Bible, and the facts of natural science, and the history of the world, there must be an essential agreement, whether there exists the evidence to prove it or not. Time devours documents; and much of the history of the world never was written. But the fact of this agreement is deduced from the primary axiom, affirming inspiration. The Spirit of all truth could not fail to guide the writers free from all errors respecting natural science and the history of the world. It is high consolation that there is not one such error in all the Bible.

AXIOM IX.

The Bible is not to be interpreted by any creed or confession of faith.

Creeds and confessions of faith show merely how their authors interpret the Bible. On what principle then can such interpretations be made the criterion of the sense of Scripture. They may be right, they may be wrong; but they cannot bring the Bible to their bar, and set up the claim, that at their bidding it must teach this or that.

It is the master of all creeds, the sovereign of

all confessions of faith, in whose presence they must all bow and do reverence. It is very customary to quote the church formula, and say the Bible teaches so; but in every instance, those who fall into this error, proclaim only how great their ignorance is of the Word of God.

AXIOM X.

While the Bible has one meaning in every passage and no more, it does not follow that the words employed by the sacred writers have always one meaning and no more.

Yet it is a settled theory with some, that certain leading words in Scripture have but one meaning, and only one. On what evidence they found this position we cannot so much as imagine. The appeal must be made to the Bible itself; for this position is not by any means self-evident. There are those, whose separate communion is upheld and justified simply on the ground that the word "baptize" has only one meaning, and no more. But on turning to the Bible, we find that (1) in Mark vii. 4, it is used to mean the washing of hands; (2) in 1 Cor. x. 2, it is used to signify consecration to the leadership of Moses; (3) in Luke iii. 16, it is used to signify the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the

infliction of the wrath of God; two very different and opposite meanings in one sentence! See also Mat. iii. 11, Acts xi. 16, 1 Cor. xii. 13. (4) In Luke xii. 50, our Lord employed the word to signify the peculiar sufferings then in store for himself as the sacrifice for sin. So also in Mat. xx. 22–3, and in Mark x. 38. Where then is the one only meaning of the word? It cannot be found.

Indeed, as all the world knows, there is no such thing in existence as a word with only one meaning. Just as well might it be pretended that every word has but one use, and no more; for the use to which a word is put gives it its meaning, and men do not hesitate to put every word to a thousand uses. Examples are on every page of the Scriptures; and yet there is harmony of sense and doctrine there. The vision of Ezekiel, i. 4–25, is a beautiful illustration of this point. There is the most wonderful complexity and variety among the living creatures, and, at the same time, the most complete unity of purpose. "And they went every one straight forward; whither the Spirit was to go they went; and they turned not when they went." The words of the Scripture have many meanings; because they have many uses; but they express always the one sense of the Spirit; they go straight forward, turning neither to the right nor to the left; whither the

Spirit goeth, they go. To speak the mind of the Holy Spirit is their only mission.

AXIOM XI.

The interpretation which the Bible has given of its own meaning is in every case to be adopted.

The words *e. g.* Mat. xvi. 19, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven," receive their best interpretation by the simple historical statement in Acts, where an account is given of the apostle's success "in opening the door of faith unto the Gentiles," Acts xii. 47, and xv. 7. The Saviour's explanation of the parables are also illustrations in point; as likewise the various definitions given of the prophetic symbols in the prophets.

The Bible is an extended commentary on itself. To explain its own meaning is one of the great objects which it aims to secure. Hence of all the books ever written in explanation of the Bible, the best, beyond any doubt, is the Bible itself. This is the explanation of the fact, that those who read it most without note or comment, carefully comparing parallel passages, are proverbially the best instructed in its doctrines, and stand firmest in the faith of its awful mysteries.

AXIOM XII.

Omission is not misstatement; narration is not approval of the events narrated; additional testimony is not of necessity contradictory testimony.

These simple maxims are of no small value. In relating the same events, the same particulars are not always noted, but this does not convict the writers of falsehood, or of error in any sense. Testimony in part does not vitiate the whole, when the writer's object does not require him to narrate the whole. In recording the sins of good men, there is no approbation intended toward these sins; but the contrary. Attention to these simple positions will preclude many objections, and relieve many alleged difficulties.

AXIOM XIII.

We are not to judge of events in the Bible exclusively by the standard of our own times.

The manners, the social and political life of the people, their customs, must all be considered. The Bible is best understood in the light of its own home. Nor are we to neglect profane history, when its help can be obtained. So likewise the geography, the natural history of the country, and the idioms of the languages in which the Bible was first written,

are worthy of attention. It is not meant that a person must read and make himself master of all that has been written on these various topics, before he can ascertain the meaning of the Scriptures; only let him not neglect the aid offered him from these sources. The researches of Dr. Edward Robinson in Palestine, we note as a book of vast utility under this head.

AXIOM XIV.

We must not come with a faith, but to obtain a faith from the Scriptures.

While the use of reason is indispensable in the interpretation of the Bible, we are carefully to distinguish between its right use, and its claiming an authority superior to inspiration. The Bible and all its mysteries is put unconditionally into our hands to be interpreted; yet its relation to us can never change. It is always the Word of God; and our duty is evermore to approach it, in the spirit of Him who said: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Allowing man his place next the angels in intelligence, even then there is an infinite distance between him and the Bible; even then, he has not reached that eminence from which he can overlook its sources of knowledge. "Who hath directed the Spirit of

the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him?"

Were we called on to say, after all our researches into this subject, what error men are most prone to commit, in respect to the Bible, we would answer without hesitation, it is the error of bringing with them a faith to the Bible, to which they demand that the Bible shall conform.

The true ground on which to stand is, that when we admit the Bible to be a revelation from God, we admit it with all its appropriate characteristics; one of which is, its indisputable superiority over the powers of the human mind, both as respects the discovery of the truth, and the right method of stating the truth. When we receive the Bible in this manner we honor it, and are taught of God; when we insist that our faith and philosophy shall lord it over revelation and tell the Bible both what to say, and how to say it, we dishonor the Author of the Bible, and are taught of ourselves.

AXIOM XV.

Theories, or doctrines that have no foundation in the Bible, are to have no influence or authority in its interpretation.

The Bible is complete in itself; having authority

sufficient for its doctrines, and evidence within itself, not to be questioned, substantiating all its claims. It is a circle; a boundary, in nature, beyond which no human mind can go, without a new revelation from God. Hence all theories and doctrines of mere human invention have no weight whatever in deciding the meaning of the Bible. Because to grant them any decisive control in such a matter, would be to subject the will of God to the will of man, and the wisdom of God to the wisdom of man; the Omniscient to the ignorant, the wise to the foolish.

We find an illustration of our axiom, in regard to the theory of some respecting the human race. They hold that there is a plurality, not a unity of races; that mankind did not descend from one man. Their doctrine is extra the Bible; and we cannot allow it any place, or influence, or authority whatever, in the interpretation of the Word of God, which it so palpably contradicts. There is war between their theory and the Bible, and there is no possibility of an honorable peace between them. The whole drift of the Bible, and several of its direct assertions, are decisive that the human family came from one common head—in Adam. Come what may, therefore, of opposing theories, they may not sway us one iota in our interpretations.

AXIOM XVI.

While the Bible is infallible and capable of being understood, its infallibility does not pass over to its interpreters. They may err; the Bible never errs.

AXIOM XVII.

Those who possess the state of heart enjoined in the Word of God, are most likely to succeed in its interpretation. Because in that case, there is a kindred state of mind existing between the interpreter and the thing interpreted.

In human experience, a native best comprehends the language of a native, a friend best comprehends the language of a friend. Many young converts tell how the Bible suddenly becomes to them a new book. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine:" Jno. vii. 17.

The above Axioms are set down as primary principles, *worthy* of being kept constantly in view, in all our interpretations. To enter on the business of unfolding the sense of the Scriptures, without regard to such principles, is to proceed to sea without a compass.

On the firm, and every way safe basis which they

afford, we now advance to the statement of those general laws, or ultimate decisions of common sense, by which our investigations into the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures are strictly to be governed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BASIS OF ALL RIGHT RULES IN THIS SCIENCE.

Before we proceed to lay down any rules for the interpretation of the Scriptures, it is necessary first of all, to define clearly what we mean by a rule, and what is the true basis or ultimate principle of all right rules. We shall then proceed intelligently, having a criterion before us of all our decisions, and a test whereby all differences of interpretation may be reconciled, or shown to be erroneous.

What is a rule? We answer, a rule in this science, is a principle, or law by which we are to be governed in determining the meaning of the Scriptures, to which indeed, in certain cases, there may be valid exceptions, but which, nevertheless, is of final authority, when no valid exceptions hold. Exceptions are not incidental to all rules. They have force only where the rule is simply an approximation to the truth. But the instances in which this occurs are

not many, and the only reason why there are any at all, is that usage, in language, is capricious; it proceeds on no fixed principles. Hence, there are propositions, or principles which are merely general, and not universal, and in these cases there are exceptions, but where the principle is universal, there no exceptions hold.

What then is the basis of all right rules, or principles of interpretation?

To this point our attention is called in 2 Pet. i. 20. There it is said: "No prophecy is of any private interpretation," and the reason assigned is, that prophecy is given from God. On this is built the conclusion, that we must take heed to our principles of interpretation; they must be, not the narrow convictions of an individual, but such as become writings given from God, for the edification and guidance of all men; such, therefore, as spring from the universal convictions of the common sense of men, and fitted to stand the test of reason; for if they bear not that test, they must be unworthy to be applied to a book designed for the use and understanding of mankind. From this passage, therefore, we infer clearly the only proper basis of all correct rules of Biblical interpretation: they must violate no universal decision of common sense; or, in other words, a rule of interpretation, to be correct, must be

based on the just, and generally accepted decisions of the human mind.

Whatever may be said of this basis, so far as we can judge, there is no other, on which we can depend. If we abjure the innate common sense of men, what have we to put in its place? There has been a great outcry against human reason, as though it is not worthy to be the basis of any religious decisions. We admit reason cannot correct revelation, it cannot refute it, nor add any new truth to the catalogue of its peculiar doctrines. But there is a province in which it can act, and in which it is supreme. It can judge of right and wrong, of truth and error, of the Word of God, and of that to which the Word of God stands opposed; and its own integrity, in the proper exercise of its powers, is the only guarantee for all its just conclusions.

Common sense, therefore, we lay down, as the basis of all correct principles, or rules of interpretation.

To show how this basis applies to our subject, we affirm it a right decision of the human mind, that an inspired writer can make himself understood. If then any rule is proposed for the interpretation of the Scriptures, adverse to this decision, it is not to be entertained; because in its application, it could only lead to error. Or, if it should be advanced as a principle, that an inspired writer cannot express his

whole meaning, this also we would reject, because, if there be any difficulties in the nature of language, or in the nature of the subject, or in the capacities of those to whom the revelation is given, such as operate positively to hinder the full expression of the writer's meaning, then this strikes directly at the possibility of a revelation, and it cannot be entertained for a moment. It is here that the author of the book "God in Christ," has greatly gone out of the way. In his long and elaborate introduction, he is anxious to establish the dogma of the *insufficiency* of language, even in the hands of the Holy Spirit, as a vehicle of truth, and this chiefly in reference to the important doctrine of the supreme divinity of Christ. But granting him his point, we submit, on the strength of his own favorite dogma, whether, in consistency, he ought not, in illustration of his own doctrine, to leave writing on the nature of language, and of Christ, entirely alone? For surely, if an inspired writer, with all the aid of the Spirit of God, cannot make his meaning clear and intelligible, *a fortiori* an uninspired writer must give up all such efforts in despair—unless indeed, a man *not* inspired has altogether the advantage over one who enjoys the help of the Holy Spirit!

Once more; it is a correct decision of common sense that an inspired writer must have but one self-

consistent, and intended meaning to convey. Any other conclusion would be unworthy of revelation. If then any rule is proposed, implying a double meaning in the Scriptures, or as many meanings as the language would by any means bear, it is not to be adopted. The universal expectation of men, founded on their ideas of the veracity of God, is, that in revealing His will, He will speak sincerely and directly the thing He means, and no more.

Finally, it is another just decision of common sense, that the sacred writers under the guidance of the Spirit of God, must write in harmony with the actual nature of things; for to write in a contrary manner would not be to write the truth. It is absolutely certain therefore, on this ground, that the Bible does always speak consistently with the true nature of all the objects of which it treats. And hence, if any law of exegesis be proposed, which in its fair application must lead to a sense contrary to the nature of the objects spoken of, that law or rule is unsound and must not be adopted. Indeed, all laws or rules of interpretation must proceed on the ground that inspired writers will speak of all things according to their nature, and not otherwise.

These remarks will show to some extent, what the standard of correctness is, which we have here set up. Rules to be correct, and worthy of adoption,

must be founded on the just decisions of the human mind. They must commend themselves to the honest convictions of men. Like definitions in Mathematics, they must carry with them the understanding, and as it were, compel the assent of the mind, at the first glance.

Keeping these principles strictly in view, we now proceed to the work of interpretation, and lay down the general rules of the science, with examples of the manner in which we apply them, in ascertaining the true sense of the Sacred Scriptures.

> Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
> Before all temples, the upright heart, and pure,
> Instruct me, for thou knowest;
> —what in me is dark
> Illumine; what is low, raise, and support,
> That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert eternal Providence
> And justify the ways of God to man!

CHAPTER VII.

GENERAL RULES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

A RULE of interpretation, according to our definition, is a principle by which we are to be governed in our efforts to ascertain the meaning of the Scriptures. It is founded on the just decisions of common sense, and except where limited by some incidental circumstance, arising from the nature of the proposition, it is authoritative and final on every judgment we may form relative to the sense of the Sacred Volume.

I. FIRST GENERAL RULE.

The first rule we lay down therefore is, that the literal or obvious meaning of Scripture is generally the true meaning.

By the literal meaning here, we do not intend the meaning of the letter strictly, as opposed to that which is figurative; but the plain and obvious sense

of the words in their ordinary signification. Our rule proceeds on the ground that the Bible was written for the whole world, and that therefore to meet the universal expectation of men, its meaning lies for the most part transparent and clear on the surface, before the eyes of all who seek after it with an honest mind. It was a familiar saying of Luther, "the literal meaning of the Scripture is the whole foundation of faith; the only thing that stands its ground in distress and temptation." The power of this maxim he fully proved in the great Reformation.

The meaning, then, which lies plainly on the surface, and is contained in the letter of the Scripture, in its ordinary signification, is generally the true meaning.

But in this instance our rule is only an approximation to the truth, and is limited by the following exceptions:

FIRST EXCEPTION.

Where the literal meaning asserts that which involves a known impossibility, it must be given up.

By a known impossibility, we mean a position such as the following: a doctrine can both be true

and false; two objects can occupy the same place, at the same moment; a moral being can be guilty of sin, before the exercise of his moral faculties; a moral being can act before he exists.

But it cannot be conceived possible that the Spirit of God should in any case design to assert such positions as these. Hence this exception to our first general rule, becomes itself a rule of interpretation, and we apply it in all the passages which seem to assert a known impossibility, like any of those above. For example, Ps. lviii. 3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray, as soon as they be born, speaking lies." The meaning of the letter here is, that the wicked go astray, or sin, the same moment in which they are born; and that in the same moment, they both walk and speak lies! It is simply incredible that such can be the intended sense of this passage.

Jer. xii. 13, "They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns." Did the prophet mean just so?

1 Cor. xv. 22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." These words, "as in Adam all die," cannot be intended to say that all men existed in Adam; nor that they all sinned in his person; nor that they all died when he died. These are known impossibilities. One person cannot be all mankind; all mankind cannot be one person;

men cannot exist before they exist; they cannot die before they live; they cannot sin before they act.

Amost every page of the Bible will furnish examples of our exception; and that candor, which is the proof of a sane mind, will not fail to see that to insist on the meaning of the mere letter, in such cases, is the most certain method of bringing the Bible into contempt.

SECOND EXCEPTION.

When the meaning of the mere letter is evidently contrary to reason, it is not the true meaning.

This exception, though logically involved in the first, we prefer to state separately in these terms; for the sake of giving a wider application to the principle on which it is based, and because we wish here to restore to its true use a canon of interpretation, the perversion of which has led to many great errors. It is well known that in Germany, under the phrase "pure reason," it was attempted, simply by way of interpretation, to get rid of Christianity altogether. And some of the most plausible and mischievous of all attacks on religion have been made under pretence that its doctrines are repugnant to reason. All such attacks we wish to forestall. Our chief weapon for the defence of religion, and of the Bible, its text-

book, is our reason, *rationally* used. And on this ground we feel sure that the Spirit of God, speaking in the Scriptures, does not in any instance intend to assert for truth what is evidently contrary to the decisions of human reason rightly employed. It may indeed be that things beyond the comprehension of reason are asserted, and facts announced, such as are properly inscrutable to the mind of man. But to assert things which reason cannot comprehend in their modes, is not equivalent to asserting things contrary to the innate dictates of reason. It is one thing to reveal what reason does not and cannot know of itself, and it is quite another thing, palpably to contradict decisions, which reason cannot but make, in the legitimate use of its powers. The former Scripture has often done; the latter, never.

In illustration of our exception, we refer to passages such as the following: Heb. xii. 29, "For our God is a consuming fire." By the mere letter, this asserts the ancient doctrine of the Persians, that God is literally the principle of fire; but any such interpretation would be at war with common sense. So also, Jer. xxiii. 24, "Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord." Here the mere letter is Pantheism; but nothing could be more opposite to reason. Jno. vi. 53, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and

drink His blood, ye have no life in you." The letter of the passage must surely be given up, as contrary to all reason. Phil. ii. 12, "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." If we interpret these words, so as to make the divine agency exclude and wholly absorb the agency of the believer, our interpretation would be contrary to reason, and wrong; it would deny the identity and activity of the human mind, and contradict just what the passage in its true sense means to affirm. It is not God who "willeth and doeth," but who worketh or produces the willing and the doing in the mind of the willer and the doer.

THIRD EXCEPTION.

When the literal meaning contradicts any positive precept of Scripture, it must be abandoned.

The basis of this exception is the principle that the Bible is self-consistent in all its teachings, through the inspiration of the Spirit.

For example, Mat. xviii. 9, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," &c. If a strictly literal interpretation were insisted on here, it would be at variance with the sixth commandment. So also Eph. iv. 26, "Be ye angry and sin not." One of the positive precepts of the Gospel forbids all anger. How then are we to interpret the first clause of the above

passage consistently with the above precept? The feeling of the mind described by the word "anger" is complex, and consists of a perception of some wrong suffered, and of a desire to be revenged. The first feeling—the perception of the injury suffered—is a right feeling, and ought to be diligently cultivated, because it is needful to keep alive in our minds the distinction between right and wrong in conduct. But the second feeling, a desire for revenge, is expressly forbidden. Hence we interpret the above passage thus: when you receive an injury be not insensible thereto; take full cognizance of it, as a wrong—"be ye angry;" but there let your feelings rest; "sin not," cherish no wish for revenge. For it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." This meaning violates no precept, and is the sense of the passage. Prov. xxiii. 2, "Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite." This is not an exhortation to suicide, but a warning against gluttony.

FOURTH EXCEPTION.

The literal meaning is not the true meaning, when there is an express limitation of it elsewhere affirmed.

Such is the nature of all writing, that limitations of previous statements would seem to be as necessary

as words themselves. Every writer makes use of them to set his meaning in its proper light; and the more direct and simple his manner of writing, the greater need of just such explanations of the sense. Thus of all writers of the Bible, John is the most simple and direct in his style, yet none of them seems to be under such constant necessity to qualify his language. For example, John i. 11, 12; "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." From this it would seem that not a solitary Jew believed in Christ. But in the next sentence, is the needful limitation, "But as many as received him." &c. A very slight examination of John's writings will supply many more illustrations; see also Judges ix. 5. Mat. xxvi. 60. John i. 8, with iii. 9. In 1 Chron. xxiii. 13; it is said the priesthood is established "for ever." But in Jer. xxxi. 31–4. and Heb. 8th and 9th chapters, the continuance of the priesthood, and of the whole old dispensation is limited to "the set time," when that dispensation should be done away. Our interpretations, to be correct, must never lose sight of this principle.

With these four exceptions, for which there is certainly good ground, and which, in their operation, become rules not to be overlooked, we re-affirm our great first law of Biblical exegesis, viz., the literal, or obvious meaning of any passage is generally to

be taken as the true meaning. In setting this forth as the first and fundamental law of interpretation, we go directly contrary to the whole body of early interpreters. In their view, it was a dishonor to the Bible to represent its meaning as lying patent on the surface. The more deep and hidden the sense, the more worthy it was of their faith, the more truly did it prove itself the Word of God! But the evidence is all too abundant, that this love of a deep and hidden sense wrought no good, but incalculable mischief. It was one of the sources of the great apostasy. In its essence, it is a mere conceit, unworthy of the Sacred Volume.

It is a striking fact, in this connection, that many in modern times, have made the literal sense, especially in the prophetic writings, one of the most fruitful sources of error. In their view, all prophecies are to be fulfilled in the *very letter* of the prediction. There never was a more shallow, or false view taken, either of the nature, or fulfillment of prophecy. Let any one attempt the application of this principle to the first prophecy in the Bible, and he will find out its inherent incorrectness.

SECOND GENERAL RULE.

The rule which properly follows that given above,

is one naturally growing out of it; viz.: Figurative langauge must be carefully distinguished from its opposite, and interpreted according to its nature.

The opposite of figurative language, is the language of the mere letter, in which there is no attempt at illustration, or comparison; and the principle of our rule is, that whatever is literal must be interpreted according to the rule already specified, and whatever is figurative, must be interpreted in consistency with the laws of figurative language. What these laws are, is more particularly pointed out, in the remarks on the parables and poetry of the Bible, under Rule XI. The point which we wish here more especially to settle, is, that to secure correct interpretation, figurative language is not to be confounded with its opposite, but receive its explanation, on principles such as its nature justifies.

For illustration, we refer to the first six verses of the 20th chapter of Revelation. From these verses, it is well known, an attempt is made, and has long been made, to show that at the beginning of the millenium, there will be a literal and personal appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, a resurrection of all the saints already in the grave, and the continuance of their reign with our Lord, at Jerusalem, for a thousand years.

But beyond all rational doubt, this is a palpable mistake, arising out of a neglect of our present rule. The whole passage is a figurative prediction, according to the genius of the entire book, of real events yet to occur in the history of the Gospel. But instead of interpreting the passage on this principle, the nature of the language has been overlooked, and that which is purely figurative, or symbolical, has been regarded as purely literal. Especially has this been done with verses 4, 5, 6; while it has been fully conceded, by those who have persisted in this error, that verses 1, 2, 3, respecting the descent of the angel, the binding of the dragon and his imprisonment for a thousand years, are *not* literal, but figurative. This admission is fatal to their whole theory. For the whole passage should be interpreted on the same principle throughout. It is wholly a figurative description, and therefore does not admit of a literal interpretation. Hence, there will be no literal appearance of our Lord, no literal resurrection of the saints, no literal reign of a thousand years at Jerusalem; but simply, results in the history of the Gospel, which may not improperly be compared to such events. This is all that this celebrated passage intends to affirm.

It is a violation of our present rule, also, which leads to a belief in the return of the Jews, as a

nation, to Judea. There are many passages from the prophets quoted to sustain that belief, and at present it is quite a popular belief among a certain class of writers. There can be no doubt, however, as to its origin. In Ezek. xxxvi. 25, to the end, it is said: "Ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers;" "I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the desolate lands shall be tilled," and all such language, it is contended, is prophetic of events yet to be literally fulfilled; therefore, it follows, that the Jews will be restored to their own land, and to the glory of an independent nation. The passages quoted most frequently, are Is. lx. 1–22. Jer. xxiii. 1–8. xxxi. 28–34. Ezek. xxxvii. Dan. xii. 1. Zech. viii. 12, chapters 12, 13, 14.

But we have never been able to understand the above, and kindred passages, in this light. A thousand objections occur to prevent us from forming any such judgment of the sense of these prophecies. One is, that Ezekiel's prophecy was actually fulfilled in the return from the captivity. The natural chronology of the prophecy is to this effect; hence, there is no warrant for applying it to any other future events. The others are parallel prophecies, and have the same explanation.

But if this whole prophecy of Ezekiel is yet to be literally fulfilled, and an actual return to take place,

then be it noted that, according to Chap. xxxvii. 24, which is a continuance of the same prophecy, and subject to the same principles of interpretation, DAVID is to be their King! And yet more, according to ver. 36, there are to be "heathen left round about," which does not at all comport with our ideas of the millenium; and further, if the literal sense is to be insisted on, then when the Jews return, they return simply as Jews, and remain as such, in the practice of all the ancient rites of their ancient religion, to the end of the world, so far as the text of this prophecy is concerned. The letter, therefore, of these prophecies is fatal to the very sentiments it is brought to sustain.

Our object here does not permit us to refer to the general argument from the evident design of the Gospel, as contrary to all such notions, as the restoration of the Jewish nation; but, beyond a doubt, Jerusalem has served its purpose, and the peculiar people have served their purpose, and the land is not theirs any more, seeing the glory has departed, and the law is supplanted by a more glorious dispensation; and every land is now a holy land, and every place a Jerusalem, and every believer a son of Abraham; and Jesus, David's Lord, is King in Zion for evermore; so that the next return of the Jews will be a spiritual return to the God of their Fathers, and to the

faith of Christ, and to a spiritual worship, established, not in the earthly courts of a temple made with hands, but in the heart, by the renewing influences of the Sprit of God.

Rom. vi. 4, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death," &c. These words furnish another illustration of our canon. It is contended by some that Paul means to say baptism is a symbol of the burial of Christ, and that therefore it must be performed by immersion, or a literal *burial* of the whole person in the water. But if the strictly literal sense of the word "buried" is to be insisted on, then for the same reason we insist that when Paul says in the next verse, "for if we have been *planted* together in the likeness of his death," he means that we must in some way be put into the ground, or literally *planted* like trees. What absurdity is this! Neither in the one case, nor in the other, is the language here to be taken literally. The meaning of the apostle is seen in his object. He is insisting on holiness of life in Christians. One of his arguments is taken from the fact of their baptism; he says, "they were buried with Christ in baptism;" not intending to describe the mode but the fact of their baptism, and to affirm that thereby they were consecrated to Christ and pledged to his service. On this fact he insists, saying—that as

Christ, being once dead and buried, was raised up to life again by the power of God, so they, being baptized, should be holy, and walk in newness of life. The words "buried" and "planted" are therefore used figuratively, and must so be understood; and consequently they have nothing to do with the mode of baptism.

Our rule is one that cannot be dispensed with. If figurative language is confounded with literal language, it is impossible to interpret the Bible consistently with truth, or with itself. Augustine saw this when he laid it down as a necessary principle of exegesis, that the literal and the figurative must be carefully distinguished, the one from the other.

THIRD GENERAL RULE.

A third general rule of correct interpretation is, that deductions, or inferences are not to be drawn from any text or passage, until its meaning has been ascertained.

This principle is more frequently violated than almost any other in the science; and in these violations are deeply imbedded many of the most hurtful errors with which religion is infested. Thus Mat. xvi. 28, is quoted, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church," and immediately the

deduction is made, *ubi Petrus ibi ecclesia!* The Church of Rome is the true Church, and can never fail. So Mat. xxviii. 18, "All power is given unto me in heaven, and in earth," and forthwith, the successors of Peter are infallible; they have all power over doctrine and all ordinances, over kings and all governments, to bind, and to loose, to set up and pull down at their pleasure!

Cardinal Wolsey has left us an example of the manner in which our rule was transgressed in his day. "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," Ps. cv. 15: "See," said the Cardinal, "To try a priest for any crime, is to violate God's law!"

A missionary in Syria, has furnished the following specimens, gathered from actual observation among the people around him. "In Daniel, God is called 'the ancient of days;' hence, it is proper to picture Him as an old man, and then worship the picture. The angel said to Mary: 'Blessed art thou among women;' hence, we ought to worship the virgin! Christ breathed upon his apostles, and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit;' hence, every priest is inspired in all his official acts! 'Wisdom hath hewn out her seven pillars,' therefore, the man who does not believe in the seven sacraments, is an infidel, and will certainly perish!"

This is Syrian interpretation; and nothing is more common in our own country. Can there be any greater violence done to the Word of God? Is not this what the Scripture itself calls *wresting* the Word of life? The proper remedy is our rule. First, let the meaning of Scripture be ascertained; and on that meaning, in a fair and impartial manner, build your inferences; the sense first, then all legitimate conclusions in their order. The opposite method is a stealthy, dishonest attempt to shield our errors under cover of the Word of God.

FOURTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation of any passage is to be entertained, which goes contrary to the Analogy of the Faith.

To this it is usually objected, that every interpreter makes his own analogy of the faith, and this is nothing but every man becoming his own standard of interpretation. But in reply we aver, there is a harmony of doctrine existing between the writers of the Bible, by virtue of their inspiration, and our rule is, this harmony must not be violated. There can be no valid objection against such a canon. Yet if it may appear less open to objection, let it be stated in this form: No interpretation is correct, which

makes a sacred writer contradict himself, or the well-ascertained sentiments of any of the rest.

All that we wish to secure, is the unity of doctrine which inheres in the Inspired Oracles; and our rule is as necessary as it is valuable for that object. It is capable of many illustrations. Take 1 Cor. iii. 15: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, so as by fire." The modern doctrine of purgatory, i. e. sin is purged by literal fire, is derived from this text. Not to insist on the meaning of these words as determined by their connection, we bring this modern doctrine of purgatory, side by side with the grand system of doctrines, concerning which there never has been any dispute; and the conclusion to which we come is, that any such interpretation of the passage must be false, because it goes contrary to the doctrines of the new birth, the doctrine of justification by faith, the merits of Christ's atonement, the uniform doctrine of the Bible, respecting the souls of the departed, and to many facts, recorded both in the Old Testament and in the New.

This is not to say that one text of Scripture is not authority sufficient for the establishment of a doctrine; it is simply saying that one text cannot contradict the whole manifest drift of the Bible. There is a harmony among the sacred writers not to be dis-

turbed. Then if we examine the meaning of the above passage in its connection, we shall be satisfied that the doctrine of sin being purged out of the soul after death by material fire, is not authorized at all in any sense, in these words of the apostle.

Another passage we select, which from early times has been grossly misinterpreted, in violation of our rule. It is Gen. v. 3: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." The common interpretation has been that Seth was begotten a sinner, purely *because* Adam his father had sinned. Thus Calvin says: "In saying that Adam begat a son in his own likeness, Moses refers in part to the first origin of our nature; at the same time its corruption and pollution are to be noticed, which having been contracted by Adam through the Fall, flowed down to all his posterity. Therefore Seth according to the flesh was born a sinner." There is first the assumption that corruption of nature was originated in Adam; and then the inference, that it flowed down to all his posterity; and therefore Seth was born a sinner, because he was born in the likeness of Adam.

The interpretation of Rosenmuller is different. He says, "More correctly do they hold, who think it is simply to be understood *humanity*, in which

Seth was like his father, without respect to character." To this we do not greatly object, although we do not think it is the sense of the passage as intended by Moses; but the view given by Calvin violates the entire analogy of the Bible, in regard to the manner in which men become sinners. That analogy is clearly as follows: this life is a state of probation, in which all have a fair chance of obedience, in which every man's character is according to his works; and of his works every man must give an account in the day of judgment. Such is the general drift of the Bible on the point involved in this interpretation. If it be said, that the words "likeness" and "image" imply sameness in moral character, we reply there is no evidence of any such fact, neither in the word itself, nor in its usage; but very much to the opposite, James iii. 9, says men are made "in the similitude of God." Are they made like him in moral character? In Rom. viii. 3, it is said, "sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Was our Lord then born a sinner? Not at all. If Seth was a sinner born, by the law that like begets like, we have yet to learn it. There is no such law in regard to moral character. If there were, it would disprove all distinction between man and the brutes; free agency would be a delusion; this life would be a state of condemnation, in which

all the principles of natural justice would be violated by a law of nature; immortal souls would be doomed to endless woe, not for their conduct, but for their nature, not for their sins, but for their being born of sinners. And if this be all just so, then common sense is outraged; and let no teacher of the Gospel henceforth mock his fellow men with arguments on probation and destiny; what probation can there be, where all are *condemned* before the trial begins?

This is not to say that men do not inherit from Adam constitutional propensities, as distinct from moral propensities. We suppose and believe they do. But in no sense do these constitutional propensities, thus inherited, necessitate the commission of sin; nor is there any evidence in the Scriptures that they are ever charged upon man as sinful. If they were resisted, as they should be, they would contribute to the stability of obedience in the soul. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he has overcome, he shall receive a crown of life." James i. 12.

The true meaning of the above passage, as seen in its connection, is a record of Seth's name in the genealogy of the Church. Next to his father, he bore the image of a man of God, and thus continued the line of the faithful. Cain was living when Seth was born, but his name is not given, nor is it said

that he was born in the image of his father. The reason is obvious. He was a wicked man, while Seth was a righteous man, like his father Adam, after his repentance and submission to God.

The following texts are capable of the same perversion as that above. 1 Sam. ii. 25: "Notwithstanding they hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." Prov. xvi. 4: "The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Exod. xi. 10: "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let Israel go out of the land." Is. xlv. 7: "I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." Jno. xii. 37–40: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake; Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

Any interpretation of these and kindred texts, of which there are many more in the Scriptures, so as to make them teach the doctrine that God is the

primary and efficient cause of sin, or that He gives it being in men, by a law of their nature, or, that he is in any degree desirous of its existence, must be false; the analogy of the faith, the whole drift of the Bible forbids it. The Bible will not tolerate the idea that God is the author of sin, either directly or indirectly. He is angry with the wicked every day. In Him, and in all His ways towards men, there is no iniquity at all. By His righteous decree, the wages of sin is eternal death. Our interpretations, therefore, must have respect to the analogy of the faith. If they are contrary thereto, they are wrong.

FIFTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation is correct which is contrary to the known nature of things.

The ultimate principle on which we rest this canon, is the fact that the Bible, as an inspired book, from which error is excluded, contains nothing opposed to the known nature of things. We do not mean that the Bible contains nothing, but what *man* knows to be the nature of things; for if it contained nothing but what man knows in respect to the nature of things, it would be no revelation; it would be simply a record of what man knows. But we mean, that as an inspired volume, the Bible everywhere

speaks consistently with things so far as they are known by man, in their natures, and not otherwise; while at the same time, it reveals many things, for ever out of the reach of the powers of man to discover.

But many fall into error on this point. They accept the above rule, and when they meet with a text, for example, affirming the divinity of Christ, they say, this cannot be; because we know all about His nature, and no interpretation is correct which runs contrary to the known nature of things. Their error is obvious. They take for granted what they ought to prove. They ought to prove that they know all that is true of the nature of Christ. Instead of this, they presume that nothing can be true of Him, but what they know! Yea, that the Holy Spirit did not mean what the plain and obvious sense of the language must mean, if any dependence whatever is to be placed on its teachings, when it declares that Christ is God over all, blessed for evermore.

It must be confessed there are some things about whose nature man can and does know somewhat; and if he does not know all that is true of them, yet he does know much that is; and of course he can know when the things he does know are contradicted. For example, he can know respecting his

own nature, that he is a free agent; he is conscious of it. He can also know that his nature does not embrace the attribute of Omniscience; for a like reason, he is conscious of it. He can also know that his conscience does not accuse him of sins, which he never committed. But as this knowledge of his free agency, and of his not being omniscient, and of his conscience not accusing him of other men's sins, is strictly infallible, our position is that the Bible in no case contradicts it. In other words, the meaning of the Bible will be always consistent with the known nature of things in all cases in which that nature is known by men.

For illustration, we take Rom. v. 19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." If now this be so interpreted as to mean that men are made sinners, merely by the sin of Adam, without their knowledge or consent, we interpose our rule. Such a sense is contrary to the known nature of man, as a free agent. That nature is such that he cannot be made a sinner, but by his own personal and voluntary choice. Besides, the terms of justification through the merits of Christ are such, that no man can partake of its benefits save by a personal and voluntary faith in him. If, therefore, men are not made righteous through Christ, except

on condition of their voluntary faith, neither, in all fairness, are they made sinners through Adam, except on condition of their breaking the divine law, through the free choice of their own wills. Whatever meaning, therefore, may be affixed to the passage, it must be one that shall consist with the nature of man, and with the nature of sin; for it is a primary principle, that the Scriptures everywhere speak in harmony with the nature of the objects of which they treat. This is a case where the maxim clearly applies: *ea est accipienda interpretatio quæ vitio caret*—the least objectionable interpretation is always to be taken.

Again, 2 Cor. v. 21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Here would be a positive contradiction to all the known nature of things, if it were held that Paul meant literally to say, our Lord was made *sin*. How inconceivable! We know that this phrase—the known nature of things—is scouted at as wholly unsafe in the work of exegesis; but sure are we, the thing it represents does exist and cannot be dispensed with, neither in religion nor in science. We carry it with us, as the mariner his compass. We silently appeal to it at every step. If the Bible reveals aught beyond the sphere of this knowledge, that we accept on faith, it is a revelation from God. But we have yet

to discover one instance in which the Bible directly contradicts our knowledge of the nature of things. In some instances it transcends our knowledge; but in no instance does it contradict our knowledge.

Our rule involves a vital principle, which enters into all right explanations of the Word of God.

SIXTH GENERAL RULE.

When any doctrine elsewhere clearly taught, is omitted in any passage, that passage is to be interpreted in harmony with the doctrine omitted.

The occasional omission of an important doctrine in the course of an argument, is easily accounted for by a well-known process of the mind. The legal maxim expresses it thus, "it is impossible to think of everything, to foresee everything, to express everything." The mind will not stop to compress every idea connected with the subject into every sentence. This is common in all communications both oral and written, for an opposite course would be intolerable; the sense would be buried under a mass of words, enough to baffle all human patience. But although a doctrine is thus omitted, it is not therefore to be ignored.

Rom. ix. 16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth

mercy." Here is no mention of repentance, or of faith, or obedience on the part of the sinner. They are rather represented as of no account, in the matter of salvation. Are we then to interpret the apostle as meaning that God has mercy on men whether they repent, or not? By no means.

1 Tim. ii. 5, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In this passage is affirmed the unity of God, the mediatorship, and humanity of Christ. But if it be quoted to prove Christ is simply a man, we interpose the insuperable objection of our rule. The divinity of Christ is elsewhere clearly and abundantly taught, and the sense of the above passage is to be determined accordingly. It teaches the humanity of Christ, but it does not disprove his divinity. Just as in the sentence, "man is mortal," there is a doctrine omitted, and the meaning of the sentence is to be decided in harmony therewith. That sentence does not disprove the immortality of the soul. Neither did Paul intend to deny, in the above passage, the supreme divinity of Christ. In the previous parts of the epistle, he had affirmed that Christ is God, no less than four times. A writer who has done the like in speaking of the soul, might well be understood not to deny its immortality, even though he should once or twice use the words, "man is mortal."

But it is a favorite method with some, to select all the texts, asserting the humanity of our Lord, and on these to build a denial of his divinity. As well might we collect from Scripture all those texts which assert that man has a body, and on these construct the doctrine, that the Bible teaches materialism, or that man has no soul. In Eph. v. 23, it is said, Christ is "the Saviour of the body." Are we to understand that he merely saves the body, and leaves the soul to perish? And yet this is the peculiar method of many, who reject the testimony of the Scriptures concerning Christ!

In the exposition of Acts xiii. 48, there has been a very grave violation of our present rule. "As many as were ordained unto eternal life, believed." It is argued from this, that there is no pre-ordaining, or election of the individual to eternal life, until the moment of his conversion; that the ordaining and believing, are strictly contemporaneous. This is one of the dogmas of Arminianism, versus Calvinism; and the question which decides the superiority and truth of one of these systems over the other may be narrowed down to the one precise interrogation: Does the Bible anywhere teach the pre-ordination of the believer to eternal life, *anterior* to the time of his new-birth? Calvinism says, Yes; Arminianism says, No. We then turn to Eph. i. 4–6, and find the

question solved in favor of Calvinism; "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Unless the force of these words can be disproved, or the veracity of the inspired apostle impeached, Arminianism, on this point, is left without a plea. The express declaration of the Bible is against it.

The common interpretations of John iii. 6, afford another instance in which the principle of our rule is violated. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." These words are commonly supposed to teach that all men are sinners, because born of sinful parents, sinners without any thought or action of their own. But the first objection to this, is, that it compels us, in respect to the second clause, to adopt the sentiment, that every converted person is converted by the Spirit, without any thought or choice on his part; a sentiment which is certainly false; and if this is false, the other must be so, for the same reason. But further, although there is no mention in the first clause of free agency, or of any of the attributes of man's nature, we are not therefore to suppose, that all these attributes are denied. Our Lord certainly did not mean to deny man's free agency, when he used these words; they are therefore to be interpreted in consistency with man's nature; for the facts, man's

nature, his free will, his intelligent mind, and his innate conscience, constituting his accountability, are interwoven into every page of the Bible. These words of our Lord, affirm simply the universal sinfulness of man; "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and the fact, that when man is changed from sin to holiness, it is by the agency of the Divine Spirit, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This is the true limit of their meaning. A writer using the words, "All that are born in Arabia, are Mahometans," would not mean, surely, that all the Arabians are born with the doctrines of Mahomet in their minds and hearts by nature; if he did intend to assert any such thing, who would believe him?

Neither the above text, nor any other in the Bible, means to deny the fact that men sin by the choice of their wills; and if that fact is omitted, it becomes us, as fair and honest interpreters, to interpret the words of our Lord consistently with the omission. He is the wisest and best friend of the Bible, who allows it always to speak for itself, and in harmony with itself.

SEVENTH GENERAL RULE.

No passage is to be interpreted separately from the context, nor in such a way as to contradict the context.

The primary principle on which this rule is based, is the fact that every writer depends on his whole communication, and not on any one part of it, to convey his meaning. One sentence plucked rudely from its place in an argument, it matters not from what writer, may thus be made to express a sentiment which the writer deliberately means to condemn; and yet this is the manner in which many have presumed to interpret the Word of God.

1 Cor. xv. 22: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." From these words what contradictory sentiments we have heard asserted! the salvation of all men, and the legal identity of the human race with our first parent. "There are the words, deny them if you can; and if you do, you deny the Word of God. Do not all men die? And did not death come by Adam? What then does the Apostle say of Christ and salvation? does he not affirm salvation to be as extensive as death?" thus reasoned one in behalf of the shallow sentiment of universal salvation. "In this text it is affirmed that all men die in Adam. But if so, here is the legal and moral oneness of Adam and all his offspring. If all died in him, then all lived and acted in him; his sin was our sin, his guilt our guilt, his death our death! Adam and his posterity are but one person:" thus reasoned one, thinking, no

doubt, that Paul had taught these things before him. Alas! for such errors, they are more easily exposed than cured.

By the context we perceive how absurd are these perversions. Paul is proving the resurrection of our Lord, as a demonstration of the resurrection of all men. After citing the testimony of witnesses of our Lord's resurrection, he proceeds to an argument distinct from that of testimony; viz., the design of God in regard to the matter. He says: "For since by man came death, by man also (i.e., so God designed it should be), came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." That is, as death came by Adam, so the resurrection from the dead will come by Christ; as in the arrangement of God, man brought in death, so, by the same arrangement, man would bring in the resurrection. Here is not the faintest trace of universal salvation, nor of mankind's moral oneness with Adam. The apostle was writing of the resurrection; and to that point he confines himself. His affirmation is that as death came by Adam, so life from the dead would come by Christ. Such is the precise meaning of his words, neither more nor less.

The same perversion has overtaken Job xiv. 4: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?

Not one." This is usually made to signify that sinners beget sinners, that it is impossible for children to differ in moral character from their parents, that by the mere fact of birth, they are transgressors of the law, and heirs of eternal death. If all this was really intended by these words, it is strange that it should have been expressed so ambiguously. Besides, if this be the meaning of the words, it certainly contradicts Ezek. xviii. 4, as well as the fact of our Saviour's birth.

But a glance at the context will show us the true meaning. Job is replying to the charge of his friends. They said, he was a self-righteous and impenitent man. In answer, he proceeds to confess his sinfulness, and asks his Judge: "Dost Thou open Thine eyes upon such a one and bringest me into judgment with Thee." Then follows the passage in question, in answer to the inquiry he had just made: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." We know it is argued, that he refers to the human race in the first verse: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble," and therefore he refers to the race also, in this verse. We deny the conclusion. In this verse, the reference is to himself, because it is an answer to the question immediately preceding it: "Dost Thou open Thine eyes on such an one?" &c., and it affirms

simply his own personal sinfulness. It is as though he had placed himself in the presence of his Judge, and with deep convictions of his depravity, he had said: "Can I pretend, as my friends allege, that I am righteous? I who am a sinner! No! Who, that is guilty can be proved innocent? Can a holy person be found, in one that is unholy as I am?" Such is the natural and legitimate force of the language. It is pertinent and true. But the common interpretation seems wholly out of place. It involves the absurdity that sin is a property of nature, and that men cannot be anything but sinners, by the very accident and necessity of their birth. All that Job intended to say, was that seeing he was a sinful man, he could not be regarded in any other light, in the presence of his Judge. He was confessing, not an accident, nor a constitutional element of universal human nature, but the fact that he had sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Is there a natural tendency in the mind of man to fatalism? or, to the ancient dogma of the Manicheans, who held sin to be a physical and substantial principle in man?

Let every one, who would interpret the Sacred Scriptures correctly, see to it how he studies the context, and observes the rule, never to explain any text apart from the argument in which it occurs.

EIGHTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation is correct, if it run opposite to the general design of the writer.

This rule gives a wider application to the last, and its necessity is seen in two respects; first, the immediate context may not always clearly show the design of the writer; second, the general design of a writer, to a very great extent, controls his meaning. On the latter point, it may be useful to consider the words of John Locke: "I saw clearly," says he, "after I began to reflect upon it, that if any one should now write a letter to me, as long as St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, concerning such a matter as that is, in a style as foreign and expressions as dubious as this seems to be, if I should divide it into fifteen or sixteen chapters, and read one of them to-day, and another to-morrow, it was ten to one that I should never come to a full and clear comprehension of it. The way to understand the mind of him who wrote it, every one would agree, would be to read the whole letter through from one end to the other, all at once, to see what was the main subject and tendency of it; or if it had several parts and purposes in it, not dependent one of another, to discover what these different matters were, and where the author concluded one and began another."

Thus cautiously and patiently would Locke proceed in ascertaining the main design of a writer, as an essential preliminary to the understanding of his meaning. O, that all interpreters of the Scriptures had his modesty!

For illustration of our rule we take Rom. v. 14, "Nevertheless death reigned, from Adam to Moses, even over those that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Some maintain that Paul refers here to infants dying before they sin. But this does not agree at all with the design of his general argument, and for that reason, it cannot be his meaning.

He is comparing the effects of sin through Adam, with the effects of grace through Christ, and this comparison occurs in a very extended argument, based upon the fact that all men have sinned, his main design being to prove that all men needed the salvation offered by Christ, on account of their having sinned. He admits that where no law is there is no transgression, and by fair inference no need of any salvation. But says an objector, "There was no law from Adam to Moses for two thousand years and more, hence there could be no sin, and no need of salvation, and therefore your main position, that all men need salvation, is disproved." It is in Paul's reply to this objection, that the passage above

referred to occurs. He asserts there was sin from Adam to Moses, and the proof of the fact was that death reigned over men all that time. He appeals to the universality of death to prove that they all had sinned and were in need of salvation; this was what his argument required. It would not have served his purpose to have asserted the fact of death and the need of salvation on the part of infants from Adam to Moses. During that time, death reigned over all, both old and young; and the apostle maintains that all were in need of salvation, because all had sinned. Therefore he does not mean infants, but all men living from Adam to Moses, without respect to age; for they were all under the government of God, and subject to his law, though they had no oral law such as Adam had.

Jas. ii. 14, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." This is another passage affording an illustration of our rule, and it has a history both curious and instructive.

Luther, it is well known, after a season of deep mental excitement and distress, at length found peace in the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. This doctrine very naturally became the joy of his heart. He knew no language too strong in which to state and defend it. Conceive his alarm when he read these words in James! They seemed

to contradict not only his whole experience, but the entire Gospel also. There were the words, and how were they to be explained? His enemies could quote them in triumph, to sustain their doctrine of good works; and what could he say in reply? Without seeking to explain their true meaning by an appeal to the evident design of the apostle, he rushed upon the extreme measure, never thought of before, of denying the inspiration of James' epistle, and refusing it a place in the Bible. This was disposing of the difficulty at too dear a rate, and though it embarrassed the reformation exceedingly, he maintained his opinion almost to the day of his death.

On the other hand, Luther's enemies in the Council of Trent were no wiser than he. They took this same passage to confute the Reformation; and they based on it the following doctrine and anathema: "Whosoever shall affirm that the righteous ought not to expect and hope for everlasting life from God for their good works, let him be accursed. Whosoever shall affirm that the good works of a justified man are, in such sense, the gifts of God, that they are not his worthy merits, and that he really does not deserve increase of grace and eternal life, let him be accursed." Acts. Sess. IV.

There never was a more manifest error on both

sides. Both equally failed to discover the design of the apostle in the argument where the passage occurs. As the most passing glance will show, his object was to warn converted Jews of the danger of trusting to their mere professions of faith. He would have them understand, that obedience went along with faith; and that the man who was satisfied with merely saying he believed, to the neglect of holy living, was like a body without a spirit. In all this James has no reference to the question, on what ground is a man justified? It was Paul's design to answer that question. James had another point, wholly distinct, before his thoughts. He meant to enforce practical piety, and maintained that a man, who *said* he had faith in Christ, and lived the meanwhile in sin, was a dead man; his professed faith would not save him; not because sinners are not saved by faith, but because his alleged faith, unaccompanied with obedience, was no faith at all. In this sense the above passage is to be understood; and so understood, it does not contradict, it confirms the doctrine of Paul.

By our rule we are enabled to interpret correctly the 7th Chapter of the Romans, respecting which there has been such interminable contention. It turns wholly upon the general design of the writer. That design undoubtedly was to show the effect of

the law upon the human heart, and not specifically upon the converted heart. Hence he is led, as a matter of course, to speak of the heart of man and its workings, simply as such. He, therefore, uses language which applies both to the believer and the unbeliever, and to neither exclusively. This is the true key to the sense of the chapter.

Our rule also most satisfactorily explains that much controverted passage, 1 Cor. xv. 29, "Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead." The apostle's object is to establish the doctrine of the resurrection. This verse contains one of his arguments; an argument *ex concessis*, from the concessions of those to whom he was writing. They believed in, and practised, the ordinance of baptism; and baptism was administered on the ground of the truth that there was a resurrection. Hence the apostle's question: "What shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not?" Or, what will they do in reference to the doctrine of the resurrection, who are baptized in the belief of it? Will they repudiate their own belief, and renounce their baptism? The phrase "for the dead," is used simply for another—"for the resurrection," the main word in the argument. Thus viewed, there is no obscurity in the passage, and the verse succeeding is an argument precisely of a like nature: "And why

stand we in jeopardy every hour;" *i. e.*, if there be no resurrection.

So also in respect to Heb. vii. 1–3, where Christ is said to be "without father, without mother," &c. Paul's main design in this chapter is to assert the priesthood of Christ according to the prophecy of the 110th Psalm. He admits he was not a priest after the order of Levi; but after the order of Melchizedek; and consequently he had no genealogy from Levi; he was of the tribe of Judah; neither his reputed father, nor mother, were numbered among the Levites; there was no specified age at which he was to enter upon his priesthood; and none at which he was to lay down his office, as was the custom in the order of Levi. Christ was a priest forever after the order of the King of Salem, the venerable Melchizedek.

1 Pet. iii. 18–20 is explained also by the principle of our present rule. It is not necessary that we should descend any further to particulars. To seize the general design of the writer, is one of the most sure and satisfactory methods of ascertaining his meaning; and no interpretation is correct which runs opposite thereto.

NINTH GENERAL RULE.

Of one or more possible senses, which a text may reasonably bear, that is to be preferred which best agrees with the design of the writer and the general harmony of the faith.

This rule provides for a case which not unfrequently occurs, where the words of a passage may fairly have two slightly different shades of meaning. In such a case that sense is to be taken which best agrees with the main design of the argument and the general harmony of all inspired truth.

Thus in respect to the clause "and their works do follow them," Rev. xiv. 13. If the meaning should be held to be, that the works of the pious dead follow them to eternity as the ground of their acceptance and happiness there, and for aught that appears in the language, such might be the meaning, we must then fall back on the bearing which such a sense would have on other doctrines of the Christian faith, and on the question, does such a sentiment agree with the design of the writer? A sentiment drawn from any passage, or a meaning ascribed to any passage, must not only be reasonably contained therein; it must be essentially true in itself, and in that case it will agree with the design of the writer and with the analogy of the faith. But the above

sentiment is not avowed by any sacred writer, and it is directly opposed to the doctrine of salvation by the merits of Jesus Christ. Hence it is not the meaning of the above words. The works of the righteous do indeed follow them into eternity and undergo the scrutiny of omniscience there, and receive the approbation of God; but it is not for these good works that they are saved. They are saved by grace, through faith; and that not in view of what they have done; their salvation is the gift of God, and not of works, lest they should boast.

Mat. xvi. 18, "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There are, at least three distinct shades of meaning, which these words may reasonably bear. (1) Upon such confessions as this, that thou hast made of my Messiahship, I will build my Church; or (2) upon this truth that I am the Messiah, I will build my Church; or (3) by means of thee, Peter, a man of firm and resolute will, will I lay the foundation of the Church, as a distinct community in the world. The two first are both consistent with all Scriptural doctrines, and many considerations may be urged in their favor. But the last is in harmony with actual historical facts, recorded in Acts ii. 14–36, and chapter 10th, where, by Peter's instrumentality, the Church,

composed both of Jews and Gentiles, was established as a distinct body in the world. And such an announcement from the lips of our Lord, in the circumstances, was both appropriate and significant. It was just such an announcement as he was wont to make frequently of what the disciples were to endure and accomplish; and we therefore prefer this last meaning. .The words of our Lord, when recalled by Peter, in the times of stern conflict, through which he passed, would administer an unspeakable solace, not only to Peter's heart, but to the hearts of all the disciples. But there is not one syllable in this text, to justify the wild, foolish, and wicked pretences of Popish supremacy. What has the modern Babylon, the oppressor of God's people, the exterminator of the Gospel, to do with these words, spoken by Him, whom that city of abominations loves to crucify afresh?

James v. 20, "He that converteth the sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." There are two distinct shades of meaning, which this text will bear. (1) The soul saved, and the multitude of sins that are hid, may refer to the person who reclaims his erring brother, or (2) they may refer to the brother reclaimed. If then we adopt the first, the sentiment of the apostle would be, that he, who reclaimed a

brother from sin, would save thereby his own soul, and hide the multitude of his own sins. Is this his meaning? As our rule directs, we must consider the design of the writer, and the harmony of the sentiment, with the general system of truth. With respect to the first, it does not appear that the writer meant to say—if a Christian reclaims his erring brother, he would save his own soul, and hide his own sins. The impression we receive is, that his language refers to the person who is reclaimed; and that he holds it out as a motive to action, in the work of reclaiming him. As respects the harmony of the sentiment, with the analogy of the faith, there is no doubt it is wholly at variance with it. We are saved by faith in Christ, not by acts of kindness done to erring brethren. Hence, we conclude, the meaning of the passage is, he who reclaims a backslider is the means of saving the backslider's soul, and of hiding his sins. This is consistent with the design of the writer, and with the general harmony of the faith.

TENTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation is correct, which violates the grammar, or the idioms of the language in which the Scriptures were at first written.

All translations of the Bible are liable to mislead us, in respect both to the grammar, and the idioms of the original language in which it was composed. The English translation, although beyond all question, the most perfect translation ever made, is not free from errors of this description; some, perhaps, unavoidable, others, the effect of a faulty interpretation; for every translator is of necessity, an interpreter, in a very high and important sense.

An illustration of the application of our rule is found in Dan. iii. 25. There the King of Babylon is made to say: "The fourth is like the Son of God." But this is not justified by the original. The Hebrew noun for "son," is without the article; and the sentence should therefore read: "The fourth is like a son of God," or, is like a divine being. Often do readers of the English Bible wonder how the heathen king of Babylon could have had any knowledge of the Son of God, so as to identify his appearance in the fiery furnace; but the fact is, he had no such knowledge; and his language properly rendered, conveys simply the idea, that the person whom he saw, was in his judgment a divine being, and not a man like the other three.

Another passage which our rule enables us rightly to interpret, is Eph. ii. 8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the

gift of God." It has been contended that Paul here meant to say, faith is the gift of God, and in such a sense too, that it is not the act of the believer at all. But the original Greek forbids such an interpretation. For Paul uses a pronoun in the neuter gender, when he says, "it is the gift;" whereas, had he intended to refer to "faith," he must have used a pronoun in the feminine gender, to agree with it. His meaning, as seen by the original, is, that salvation by grace, is the gift of God.

Rom. viii. 7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." These words are often used, in the sense that the powers and faculties wherewith men are endowed, the very constituents of the mind itself, are depraved and sinful, apart from their actions. Those who insist on this sense, are in need of it, to sustain a certain theory; and Scripture was competent to have asserted the doctrine, had it been true. But it is not here that this assertion is made. The original is: "the minding, or pursuit of carnal things" is enmity against God; the proper Greek word for "mind" is not in the sentence. Hence it is not the mind itself that is enmity against God, but the pursuits, desires, and works of the mind.

The Douay translation has violated, in a great number of instances, the original language of the Bible. Thus, in Exod. xxxiv. 29, it says: "Moses

knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord." This ludicrous mistake is copied from the Vulgate, the author of which did not, or could not, distinguish between the Hebrew word for horn, "Keren," and the word "Karan," he shone. Also in Heb. xi. 21, there is a very gross violation of the original. It is a marvel that learned men, such as many of the Romanists are, should ever have suffered such a willful perversion of the Scriptures to go out into the world. The Greek is *'επι τό ἄκρον της ῥάβδου αὔτοῦ*—"upon the top of his staff;" being an old man, Jacob worshipped, as he blessed the sons of Joseph, on the top of his staff. He did not bow himself to the ground, as the usual custom was. The Douay translation has it: "*He adored the top of his rod!*"

Under this rule falls Acts iii. 19, 20. The fault with the translation consists in its making the apostle say what plainly does not harmonize with his design. He is preaching immediate repentance, and of course gives reasons for the duty. The particles *ὅπως ἄν* should have been translated, "since," or "seeing that," as the design of the argument clearly demands. "Repent—since, the times of refreshing are come from the presence of God, and since he has sent Jesus," &c.; this was the meaning of the apostle in his preaching, without any doubt.

Ps. x. 3: "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, *whom* the Lord abhorreth." Here is another instance where our rule holds; for there is no authority for the word "whom" in the original. It is "He abhors the Lord," and is another item in the character of the wicked man.

Acts xii. 4: "Intending after Easter to bring him forth," is a translation for which there is positively no apology. None of the apostles ever heard of "Easter." The word in Greek is "Passover."

Acts ii. 27: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell;" the use of the word "Hell," in this instance, conveys more than the original. With us, it means the world of torment, as opposed to Heaven; but the Greeks had a word which signified simply the world of spirits, as opposed to this world, a word which did not convey the idea of misery or of happiness with it. It is the word Hades; and this is the word used in the original of this passage. It should have been: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in the state of the dead, or in the world of spirits." Not that there is no place, revealed in Scripture, such as our word Hell properly designates; but that in this instance our translators made use of too strong a word for the original.

The importance of our rule may be seen, if in

nothing else, in the value of a thorough knowledge of the languages, in which the Scriptures were at first composed. All honest interpreters will give it its due share of importance. Those who have not such a knowledge of the original languages, may be expected to speak with modesty respecting the meaning of passages, whose sense is either doubtful, or obscure.

ELEVENTH GENERAL RULE.

Comparisons drawn from the social or material world, for the purpose of illustration, are not to be interpreted, as applying in every particular to the subject which they are intended to explain; nor is any doctrine to be founded on such comparisons.

The philosophy of this rule enters into all sound interpretation, and is more extensively connected with the true understanding of the Scriptures, than any other principle in this whole science. It lies in the fact that the world of matter, from which comparisons are taken, is so immeasurably removed in nature, from the world of spirit, that the two never can be blended into one. Matter is not Mind; and though the laws by which matter is governed may illustrate the certainty and force, with which the laws of mind operate, yet these laws are not identi-

cal and never can be. They are as diverse as the things themselves out of which they spring, or to govern which they are enacted by sovereign wisdom. A wicked man, for example, may love his sins, as invariably as the stone unsupported falls to the earth; and the strength of his love for his sins, may not inaptly be compared to that law which always brings the stone to the ground. But there is a vast difference between the powers of a wicked man to abstain from, or repent of his sins, and the powers of a stone to remain unsupported in the air. The difference is so vast, there neither is, nor can be any proper comparison in the case; it is the difference between a power wholly competent to follow its own choice, and a power competent only of acting in one way and without choice, without the possibility of ever moving in any other direction than that in which it is moved. The laws of mind, and the laws of matter are thus infinitely and eternally distinct.

The Bible written for the whole world, in a style peculiar and intelligible to the whole world, employs comparisons with great frequency, and in all their various forms. Hence the importance of looking well to our principles of exegesis, in all cases where these comparisons occur; and especially where they are employed to illustrate states of mind or of moral character in man.

Rom. ix. 21: "Hath not God power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor." If this text should be interpreted so as to mean, that, as the potter makes one vessel for this purpose, and another for that, so God creates one man, and destines him for heaven, and another, and destines him for hell, precisely and absolutely on the same principles as the potter his vessels, we would solemnly protest against it. The comparison is not to be carried to the unreasonable length of saying that man is purely a piece of clay in the hands of his Creator. To make it apply in every respect to the subject which it illustrates, would destroy the eternal distinctions between mind and matter, and between the moral law, and the laws of brute force, by which the material world is governed.

Eph. ii. 1: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in tresspasses and sins." This is the language of comparison, and the comparison is between those who had been unconverted sinners, and the dead; and some have carried it so far, as to affirm the meaning of the apostle to be, that the unconverted *can* no more repent, nor believe, nor think a good thought of themselves, than a dead person, nailed up in his coffin, can of himself rise to life; that the entire want of power is as real in the

one case as in the other, and that Paul meant in this language to say so.

But how immeasurably does this fall short of the apostle's meaning! He tells plainly what he meant by being "dead in sin." It was not the absence of all power to do good, in men, that he thought of affirming; it was simply the fact that while they were unconverted, they had been insensible to the duties of religion; in this lay the similarity of their moral character, to the condition of the dead. He says, "In time past, they had walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh." Here was their ability to do evil affirmed; and the power to do good is implied in the same terms. Comparisons are not to be pressed beyond the nature of things. They are points of likeness, wherein one thing partially resembles another, and nothing more. No writer ever uses them as independent proofs of his doctrine. Indeed, all moral truth stands on its own basis, not needing any other. The truth, that an unconverted man is uninfluenced by the law of God, so as not to be governed by it, as truly as a dead man is uninfluenced by the things of this world, rests for its proof, not on any point of similarity between his condition and that of a dead man, but on the fact that he is led away by his sins, so as to disregard the law of God altogether. This state of

mind is spiritual death; *i. e.*, it is a state of hardness and insensibility, in which the soul takes no pleasure in the will of God; and out of this state every converted man is quickened by the Spirit of God, at his new birth. Such is the meaning of the apostle.

Jer. xiii. 23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Here there is a comparison strictly of the same nature as the last. It lies between the Ethiopian's power to change his color, or that of the leopard to change his spots, and the power of a man accustomed to do evil, to change his habit of sin, and do good. But we would greatly err were we to insist on a perfect and absolute similarity in all respects in the two cases. The difficulty in the way of a sinner is the force of a long-cherished habit; that in the way of the African and the leopard, is a natural impossibility, arising from a law beyond their control. Will any sane man say, these two things are in every sense the same?

MEMORANDUM.

It is under this rule touching comparisons, that we place the explanation of a certain large class of words, descriptive of man's character, and the states

of his heart, in view of the moral law. Some of these words are the following: *abominable*, *adulterous*, *backsliding*, *blind*, *corrupt*, *carnal*, *crooked*, *defiled*, *dead*, *earthy*, *evil*, *fallen*, *feeble*, *filthy*, *fleshly*, *flesh*, *hardened*, *iniquity*, *lusts*, *natural*, *naked*, *polluted*, *sinful*, *transgressing*, *unclean*, *ungodly*, *wicked*.

The words *depraved*, *depravity*, are not used in the Scriptures, are of a Latin origin, and fall under the same law as the above.

First as adjectives, then as nouns, or names of the states described by the adjectives, these words, when applied to human conduct and character, always imply a comparison, expressed or understood. Thus in reference, for instance, to the word "corrupt," we say, the heart of man is corrupt; but we do not mean that the heart is literally corrupt, like a carcass in a state of decay or putrefaction. In such a case, such a meaning would simply be absurd. All these words applied to man's heart and its affections imply a comparison, which, in respect to the word corrupt, may be expressed thus: as a material body, in a state of decay, is offensive, and fit only to be removed from our presence; so, a human heart, that loves to sin, and sets its affections on things prohibited, is offensive to God, and fit only to be removed out of His sight. In all this we do not refer to the facul-

ties, or heart of man as such; but to his voluntary conduct, as a moral being in view of the moral law. The offensiveness and corruption which attaches to his heart is his voluntary choice of sin, his willful disobedience of the law of God. Whenever the heart of man is thus set on sin, such is human language, that, in describing the fact, we are under a necessity of employing a class of words, which, in their primary signification, describe physical or material states; and hence arises the implied comparison of which we have spoken. Never must this fact be forgotton; nor do we know of a more pregnant and necessary caution to urge on all who interpret the Word of God.

In Gen. vi. 11, it is said, "The earth also was corrupt before God." This does not mean that men's faculties of mind and heart were in themselves bad; for the faculties of the soul, as such, are neither good nor bad; there is no moral standard for them. The only standard of goodness and badness in the universe, is the moral law, and that has respect, not to faculties in themselves, but to the exercise of faculties; to actions, only. It is the voluntary employment of man's faculties against God which constitutes the *corruption*, *pollution*, *depravity*, *sinfulness*, *vileness*, *and uncleanness* of his heart. If he never sinned by breaking the law, he would never

sin at all. So that when the words above quoted are applied to his character, it is not in a direct and primary sense, but implying merely a comparison, as above described, to material objects; and the words must be interpreted accordingly.

The word "natural" is used just once in the Bible, to describe character in man; 1 Cor. ii. 14; and a very common error is to suppose that it means man simply as a creature; whereas it means man as following his own chosen ways—man freely doing wrong, and unwilling to subject himself to the will of God. Hence, a "natural man," in the sense of Scripture, is simply a *sinning* man, an active agent, resisting the will of God, and not a creature passively existing, with sin in it, as one of its created elements. The comparison implied in this word, may be thus expressed: as nature is distinct from its author, having accidents and properties of its own, separate from those of its creator; so a natural man, in Scripture language, is a man who follows his own will as a rule of conduct; aims at his own ends, separate from those enjoined on him by his Creator—"he receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." We know of no single word which is so much abused in reference to human conduct, as this.

The above law applies to the opposite class of words, also; words describing good character in

man: e. g. *alive*, *clean*, *holy*, *godly*, *pure*, *righteous*, *sanctified*, *steadfast*, *spiritual*, *straight*, *strong*, &c. In all these there is a reference to some physical state, forming the point of comparison, between that state, and the state of the heart as compared with the divine law, the standard of right and wrong. If this fact be not constantly recognized, our interpretations cannot be according to truth, nor according to the mind of the Spirit.

The same law of interpretation holds true, of all those verbs which describe the influence of one moral being over another. Thus it is said, God "hardened Pharaoh's heart," and "the heart of His people, Israel;" and of several kings it is said, they "made Israel to sin," and "polluted the land." In Rom. 5 19, Paul has these words: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." One principle governs, in all such forms of expression. God did not harden Pharaoh's heart, as men harden iron or steel, by heating it red hot, and then plunging it into cold water. God used various expedients, to secure the consent of Pharaoh to his reasonable requirements. Pharaoh resisted all these expedients, and hardened his heart against God, and grew from time to time more determined in his purpose not to let Israel go. But now for the point of

comparison; as, by certain means iron is hardened, so by the means made use of to gain the consent of Pharaoh, his heart was rendered only more resolute in refusing; and thus it was hardened, by the force of his own will.

So of polluting the land, and making Israel to sin. Here the making to sin, is not the effect of physical power, as when a founder, out of ore makes iron, or a shipbuilder, out of timber makes a ship, or a potter, out of clay makes vessels, some to honor, and some to dishonor. In these cases, the making is the result of physical force on material objects. But man is not a material object, and he cannot be *made* a sinner in any such way, nor by any such means. So that when the language is used of him, it is used by way of comparison, or analogy only. Many—all—were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam; many were made sinners by the kings of Israel, building altars, and setting up idols in the groves, and the land was polluted by them; Mahomet made many Mahometans; Confucius made many idolators, and the Pope of Rome, many apostates from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But *how* made them? by the voluntary choice, the free consent, and unimpaired freedom of their own wills. This last item, is for evermore to be kept in mind, as a grand decision, and infallible, of common sense, to

influence all our interpretations of all such language as the above, in the Word of God. To introduce any other principles into our expositions of the Scriptures, is to pervert all common sense, and put into the mouths of infidels, objections to the whole subject of inspiration and religion, which it is utterly impossible for us to remove.

THE PARABLES.

The Parables, one of the most instructive departments of Scripture, come under the above law of interpretation. Their chief object being to illustrate the fundamental and practical doctrines of religion, errorists have made the most strenuous efforts to pervert them. Even professed friends of religion, have not not been free from the guilt of turning the Parables wholly aside from their proper object. The early, as well as the later Fathers, are replete with such perversions. We give only one instance of a modern errorist, showing the inherent folly of such men, and the miserable foundations on which they build their opinions. It is in reference to the Parable of the rich man, and Lazarus. According to this interpreter, whose name we mention not, the rich man means, "the high priest under the law;" the beggar means, "the Gentiles;" the beggar's death

means, "the close of the Levitical dispensation;" the lifting up of the rich man's eyes in hell, means, "a conviction of the condemning power of the law;" his desire to have his brethren warned, is, "the desire of Gentile converts, to carry the Gospel to apostate Jews;" the gulph is, "the time appointed for the blindness of Israel;" the five brethren are, "that part of Israel, broken off through unbelief!" What can mortal man say of such absurdities?

An elaborate treatise on the Parables has been published by Prof. Trench, a name of some power in literature. But even he is not free from the errors so palpable in the above abstract, and it is the great error into which so many fall, when interpreting these interesting compositions. Thus he makes the parable of the good Samaritan teach the mission and example of Christ; the traveller is "human nature, or, Adam, the head of the race," who leaves the heavenly city and falls into the power of Satan, and is all but killed. Christ now finds him and restores him. The wine is the blood which Christ shed; and the oil is the anointing of the Holy Spirit! the binding up is the sacraments of the Church! This is a link of "the chains;" for he quotes largely from the early Fathers, and is carried away on the flowery stream of their rhetoric with great pleasure. He objects to the maxim: "every

comparison must halt somewhere;" but his objection is merely the word, why? The answer is very obvious; because in the very nature of things, spirit and matter, between which the comparison is made, are not identical, and never can be in all respects alike.

Besides all such perversions of the Parables are in face of the fact, that the design of the Parable is usually specified; so that we have no alternative, but to take it as an illustration of the particular topic which it was designed to enforce. Indeed, everything depends on our seizing the design of the Parable. We have no authority to say it was meant for any other purpose than that intended by its Author. And here it is no small consolation to reflect, that the great mass of plain people, who receive the Bible as the Word of God, find but little difficulty in comprehending the precise point aimed at in these Scriptures. The common mind is not inferior in this respect to the educated mind; for the reason that the peculiar language of the Parable is actually more familiar in the humbler walks of life, than in the halls of learning; the cottage resounds more frequently than the college, with the bold and striking comparison, with the Parable and its clear, shining sense, understood by all, not excepting the children. Hence it is not among common readers

of the Bible that the Parables are so frequently perverted; it is among those who must make everything out of the Parables that they can, for their own purposes.

With the general rule given above, we must proceed only on such principles as apply to the interpretation of Scripture in general; taking heed not to found any doctrine on the Parables, as its ultimate ground. Not that the Parable is without its doctrine; but that the Parable is in no case the first revelation, or statement of a doctrine; it is merely the illustration of a doctrine; a doctrine put in drapery, and the drapery is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

It is a violation of this common sense principle, that leads some to find in the Parable of the fig tree, Matt. xxiv. 32–4, the restoration of the Jews as a nation to Palestine! see Cummings on "The End." And this is one of the most unfounded errors into which men fall in reference to the interpretation of the Parables.

THE TYPES OF SCRIPTURE.

We cannot allow the opportunity to pass without saying in reference to what are called "Types," that we have no sympathy whatever with those who are

so zealous in finding types in the Old Testament, corresponding to all persons, things, and places in the New. It is a principle not to be violated, that we are not to find any types, but those which the Bible itself has specified. Yet we are told by grave interpreters that Adam, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, and others, were all and severally types of our Lord; that the wanderings of Israel were types of the experience of the Church, &c. But this is wholly without any Scriptural authority, and is not to be countenanced. The example of Paul in Galatians iv., is no excuse for such fanciful notions; for there he simply takes a passage of history to illustrate his point; and this all may do, for the like reason, that it is a very instructive mode of impressing the truth on the mind. But Paul does not say, that any part of the history to which he refers, was *designed* to be a type of what he was inculcating. This is the error of which we complain as wholly unauthorized. There are types in Scripture; but we are not to add to them; neither are we to press them beyond reason. They are in nature parables, and come under the same exegetical laws. Their use is accounted for by the temporary and introductory nature of the first dispensation, in which God wisely prepared the way, in the minds of His people, for the full and more glorious mani-

festation of Himself and His truth in the perfect economy of the Gospel. Let it be a law, therefore, not to regard anything in Scripture as a type of another, except those things which the Bible has declared such.

THE POETRY OF THE BIBLE.

The interpretation of the poetry of the Scriptures is largely to be placed under the same principles as the Parables; for the good reason that comparisons, or figures taken from the material world, constitute the great staple of poetry. The usual license, or intensity of expression also, common to poetry, of itself requires great allowance, in order to secure correct exegesis. This intensity of language constitutes one of the gravest difficulties in the way of the translator, who finds it peculiarly perplexing in the poetical portions of Scripture; and hence it cannot but prove a very serious obstacle in the way of the interpreter. The greater the need of caution. The letter must not be pressed, especially it must not be pressed, in reference to doctrinal statements, when they occur in these compositions. And it is just in reference to this very point that interpreters are most singularly at fault.

A few passages eminently requiring caution we here quote:

Ps. lviii. 3–5. The wicked are estranged from the womb;
They go astray as soon as born, speaking lies;
Their poison is like the poison of a serpent;
They are like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear,
That will not listen to the voice of charmers,
Charm they never so wisely.

Ps. xxii. 9. Thou art he that took me out of the womb;
Thou didst make me hope, on my mother's breasts.

Ps. li. 5, 7. Behold I was shapen in iniquity,
And in sin did my mother conceive me.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Job xxxi. 19. For from my youth, he was brought up with me,
As with a Father;
And I have guided the widow from my mother's womb.

xiv. 3, 4. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one,
And bringest me into judgment with thee?
Who can bring a clean thing
Out of an unclean? Not one!

xv. 14. What is man, that he should be clean?
And he born of woman, that he should be righteous?

xvii. 14. I have said to corruption, thou art my Father,
To the worm, thou art my mother, and my sister.

Rom. iii. 12. They are all gone out of the way;
They are together become unprofitable;
There is none good, no not one.
Their throat is an open sepulchre;

With their tongue they have used deceit;
The poison of asps is under their lips.

Such quotations might be greatly multiplied, but we intentionally limit ourselves to these, as a specimen of one class of texts, most strangely and widely perverted. They are made the proof texts respecting man's character, without any allowance for the nature of the composition, or of the subject matter of which they treat; the naked letter is insisted on, as though everything was meant which the letter affirms. But the most illiterate person must see that language such as the above, is not the language of sober statement, but of highly wrought poetic emotion, and for that reason it requires very cautious interpretation. Instead of caution, however, theologians—the last men in the world who ought to be guilty of such indiscretion—have insisted on the letter to the uttermost. They regard such passages as the absolute *dicta* of the severest and most precise systematic theology. They make no allowance for the poetic nature of the composition; they demand that these intense stanzas of

Thoughts that breathe
And words that burn,

must be interpreted and regarded as maxims in

religion, to which, as to a line drawn with mathematical exactness, all our ideas must rigidly conform. What would be thought of the sanity of a writer who should insist on interpreting modern poetry on this principle. Try this dead letter system on Shakspeare, Young, or Milton; or, on many of the sublimest portions of the Bible itself, which have no reference to human character, and see how it would confound all sense.

For instance try it on the following:

Ps. lx. 8. Moab is my washpot;
Over Edom will I cast my shoe;
Philistia triumph thou, because of me!

Ps. xxii. 6. But I am a worm, and no man;
A reproach of men, and despised of the people.

Hab. iii. 3–6. God came down from Teman,
And the holy one from Paran.
And His brightness was as the light.
He had horns coming out of His head;
And there was the hiding of His power.
Before Him went the pestilence,
And burning coals, went forth at His feet.
He stood and measured the earth;
He beheld, and drove asunder the nations;
And the everlasting mountains were scattered,
The perpetual hills did bow;
His ways are everlasting!

Ps. lxxviii. 65. Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.

Let the naked letter be insisted on in such passages, and why not, if in the other; and what absurdity would be the result! Why is it never attempted? When we find, as in the 51st and 58th Psalms, passages respecting the moral character of man, does truth and propriety demand that we should abandon all common sense, and insist on all the strictness and sternness of the letter, without regard to consequences, even though it should lead us to assert that God shapes men transgressors of His law in the first moments of their existence, and dooms them to wrath before they are born? Does truth require this? Does reverence for the Scriptures require it? In our view, reverence for the Bible, and truth, and common sense, all require the very opposite.

We do not say, that poetry of necessity exaggerates even doctrinal statements. The inspired poetry of the Bible contains much doctrine, clearly and fairly stated in the very best and most impressive forms. But let due allowance be made for the intensity of poetry, especially when describing the character of man, or the ways and attributes of God. Never let the nature of the subject be forgotten; for thus only can we honor the Word of God, and gain the meaning it was designed to impart.

With these precautions, as worthy of constant remembrance, we proceed to interpret the poetry of

the Bible on the same general principles as other portions of the Scriptures.

TWELFTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation is correct when it bases any doctrine on a mere phrase.

The reason we assign for this rule is that a phrase is used simply to characterize, or qualify a doctrine, never solely to contain it. A phrase is a mere fraction of a sentence, and is necessarily relative and imperfect. No writer ever intends to found any sentiment on such a narrow basis; it would be like an effort to conceal his sentiments under cover of an adverb, or an adjective.

A writer on Leviticus has furnished a notable specimen of this error, against which our rule is meant to protect us. On Levit. xii. 2, he comments thus: "The woman is made unclean by the birth of a child. Why is this? Because the child is born a sinner, an heir of hell. She that bare him is therefore held unclean." The vicious circle in this logic is broad and distinct; we wonder it did not catch the eye of the commentator. But the basis of his comment more immediately concerns us. It is the phrase "she shall be unclean," on which he builds the doctrine that the child is "a sinner, an heir of hell;" and because of the child's character, he

concludes the mother is as bad as the child, "she shall be unclean." But in the Levitical law, this phrase had no such signification. It meant simply that the person to whom it applied, was for a specified time, deprived of certain public religious privileges. See Num. xix. *passim.* Yet our author, for reasons known only to himself, heads his comment on this passage with the words "original sin," as though that doctrine were taught us in these words —"she shall be unclean seven days!" And having found that doctrine in this phrase, he concludes with the remark, "Adam's imputed guilt rests on all his posterity." Truly, Moses did not know the deep significancy of this simple statement, that a mother, after the birth of a child, was for seven days to remain at home, and not to appear in any public religious service. See Bonar on Leviticus, p. 328, 9, Carter's edition. There is not much evidence from this commentary that our science is advancing.

The Church of Rome gives us another instance of the same error, in regard to the phrase "private interpretation," 2 Peter, i. 20. On this they rest their doctrine against the use of the Scriptures by the common people. But look at the phrase in its connection. The apostle is speaking of prophecy and not of Scripture in general, and the reason he

assigns why prophecy is of no private interpretation, or fulfillment, is because it is given not from man, but from God. On this account its interpretation is not to be governed by the caprice of any man, but according to the will of God; and, therefore, he says, "Ye do well to take heed thereto, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Hence, instead of denying the interpretation, or reading of the Scriptures by the people, the apostle solemnly inculcates the duty of their giving good heed thereto, as essentially connected with the salvation of their souls.

No doubt the Church of Rome exhibits great adroitness in explaining the Bible. There is one specimen, as showing their competency, which we cannot refuse to quote. It occurs in *Corpus Juris Canonicis*, their book of canon law; in the chapter respecting lay trustees of church property, say they, "This is prohibited in the law of Moses, who says, 'thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together;' that is, they shall not have laymen as trustees of church property!" This is competency to interpret the Bible! They have not, however, solved one difficulty—which of the two animals represents the priest?

The phrase, "blot me out of thy book," Exod.

xxxii. 32, has been made a test of Christian character; so that they who could not say, they were willing to be eternally damned, have been regarded as destitute of that submission, which is the evidence of the new birth. But plainly, it had no such force as used by Moses. He meant to say—"forget me, take no account of me, in respect to anything proposed concerning the future destiny of thy people; pass me by, regard me as not written in thy book;" without any reference to eternal woe.

The phrases, "the Lord is at hand;" "the Judge is at the door," in early times, were perverted so as to teach the immediate appearance of our Lord. So the phrases, "into the water," and "up out of the water," are supposed to teach the doctrine of immersion; with what force may be seen by comparing them with Jos. iv. 18, where there was certainly no immersion.

The father of sacred exegesis in this country, Moses Stuart, has given a striking illustration of the consequence of neglecting our rule. The phrase "things which must shortly come to pass," Rev. i. 1, led him to believe that the Book of Revelation was fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem, about 40 years after our Lord's ascension. The true force of this phrase, is that the things would shortly *begin* to be fulfilled; but how long they would continue fulfill-

ing, is not said. The whole drift of the Book shows that they would continue to be fulfilled to the end of the world,—Stuart, on Apoc. ii. vol. p. 472.

But if any illustration remains to be noticed, it is that of the phrase "by nature," Eph. ii. 3. On this single expression, which the context fully explains, is built a whole system of theology, of a certain name. It is the one solid hinge, on which that system turns. An advocate of the system, a young professor of some promise, has attempted to show from this single phrase, "that sin is a nature," and "that nature is guilt." He says, however, expressly, that sin is "self-acted," a thing done by the sinner; and that it is done "deep beyond the sphere of consciousness, in its first acts;" and yet he labors ingeniously to show, that it is not so much an act, nor a series of acts, as a "nature." What this means, we profess no ability to understand; but it verily does appear to us, that if sin be "self-acted," and "a nature" too, here is a wonderful mystery. Paul never saw so deep into the matter. Every sinner acts his sins, and they are "a nature!" Does not every sinner then, act—or create—his nature? and, is not every nature self-acted, and sinful? and yet, what of that? what advance has been made towards a solution of the great difficulty, for which this theory was invented? none at all. Much more rational is the

apostle's own version of the matter. Writing to those who had been sinners, but were then converted by the Spirit of God, he reminds them that they had been transgressors like other men, and therefore under the wrath of God. His language is, "and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." He did not mean to utter any intense metaphysical theology, such as vegetates in theological class-rooms, and dull magazines, and reviews; he did not say, by the mere accident of birth, they were heirs of eternal perdition, before ever they had acted at all; but simply, that following the constitutional desires of their nature, like other men, they had disobeyed God, and on that account, were under the sentence of His wrath. Such is Paul's meaning, lying patent on the face of his words. And what he thus declares, the Bible everywhere confirms, in reference to all that sin. The statement commends itself to common sense. Dr. Robinson, sub voce, φύσει, gives precisely this view. He says, "by nature," is the native mode of thinking, feeling, acting, as unenlightened by the influence of Divine truth." As strictly equivalent in sense, he quotes the same phrase as used by Paul, Rom. ii. 14, of the Gentiles, "who do by nature, the things contained in the law." Here then is not the shadow of a foundation, for the idea that men are sinners by creation,

or by the fact of their descent simply from sinful parents, or by creating their own nature. Men are sinners voluntarily, by the free exercise of their wills, in the *natural* way; thus they are the children of wrath; and such is the true force of the phrase, "by nature." But surely, we need hardly repeat it, such a narrow foundation as this phrase, "by nature," is all too narrow, for any such system of doctrine as that to which we have referred. If sin is by nature, it is not by will; otherwise, will is no longer will, human responsibility is more a pretence than a reality, and sin more a calamity than a crime. But in face of all these theories, this we know, that every sinner is "without excuse before God; and this proves sin to be infallibly, and always, a product of the *will.*

THIRTEENTH GENERAL RULE.

When any doctrine is stated, or event described in different passages, the briefer statement is always to be interpreted consistently with the more extended.

The soundness as well as necessity of this rule will be admitted on all hands; and it hardly needs an illustration. Yet there are instances not a few, in which its application is required.

Thus in respect to the statement of the apostle, Rom. v. 12, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." This is one of the briefest statements on the great topics of death and sin, and the depravity of the human race, that can possibly be made. It is so brief that almost any shade of sentiment on these topics may find shelter under it. But for that reason, we must the more cautiously proceed with its interpretation, that the harmony existing between it and every other Scripture on the same point, may by all means be preserved. It were surely rashness not to be defended, to conclude from these words that as sin came into the world by one man, therefore all men are sinners without any choice of their own, or that all men actually existed in the one man, acted in him, and died in him, as some interpreters have supposed. Compare with this statement of Paul, the elaborate explanation of human accountability, and human guilt, by Ezekiel in his 18th chapter.

Again; Ps. xxxiii. 9, "He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast;" and Exod. xx. 11, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day." These are passages from

which it might be supposed that this world and all its inhabitants were the work of an instant of time, or at least of six literal days. But the language of both passages is to be interpreted in harmony with the more extended account of creation in Genesis. In the fuller statement, the creation of the heavens and the earth was not the work of six days, nor of an instant; no specific time is there given in which these events occurred. Of course this is not to say but Omnipotence could have accomplished even such a work in a moment. The question in this case is not one of power, but of record; and the record must be treated, not with violence, but with fairness. The creation of the heavens and the earth was in "the beginning;" and it was the work of God; but how long it was between the first act of creation, and the setting in order the present economy, how long the earth after its creation was "without form and void," and how long the Spirit moved on the face of the deep," we know not. Our present economy, the peopling and arranging of our present world, was the work of six days as Moses relates. At least this is just the view we have felt compelled to take of the matter. But then, this is not to say that the solid globe and all upon it, and the heavens also, and all their starry hosts of worlds, and their

inhabitants, were all spoken into being in the precise space of six days. This is what Moses and David surely did not mean to assert.

There is a brevity of expression, a swiftness of thought, a condensation of words, which is not explicable, save with caution and patience. He is the best interpreter who most religiously keeps this in mind, and who gives to Scripture the privilege of uttering its whole testimony in its own way.

FOURTEENTH GENERAL RULE.

No interpretation is to be entertained as sound, which violates the explicit definitions of Scripture.

In definitions consists the certainty of all science, and the harmony of all Christian doctrine. Those of Scripture are permanent way-marks in the path of the interpreter, which, if he neglects, he will surely wander into error. As marking the boundaries of doctrine, they are, of course, everywhere the same, in all the sacred writers, running through the entire system of inspired truth, and holding the consistency of the whole compactly together. There is no book of exact science in which there is greater precision and clearness of definitions, than in the Bible. Our canon is a fundamental one; wherever

there is a definition, our interpretations must be consistent with it.

For example, it has been attempted to maintain that the six days in Genesis are six periods of indefinite extent; and the origin of the attempt has been through the discoveries of geology. If the six days are regarded as six periods, the Bible and geology, it is argued, can be reconciled. The question, we submit, is not, were there six periods of indefinite length, before the constitution of the present world? but, *did the sacred writer intend to speak of six such days, as that word most usually represents?* We do not deny the existence of six periods, such as geology requires; but we think there is good reason for believing that Moses meant six usual days, in his account of the setting in order of our present world. Witness his definition of the word "day," in the fourth commandment. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," &c.; "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day."

This is a precise and intelligible definition of what a day is. We say not that it defines the amount of work done; we say not that all creation was literally spoken into being just in six days; but we do say

that here we get the idea definitely imparted of the length of a day, as it is used in the account of the arranging and peopling of our present world. The setting in order of our present globe, and the creating its inhabitants, is not equivalent, as we understand it, to the creation of the whole universe; but it is affirmed definitely, that it was accomplished in six days of ordinary time; and hence, however long the world may have existed before these six days, its present order was the work of that precise period, if language is to be understood in its ordinary signification; if not, we know not what to say. Philosophy and science may do much; but this they cannot do—they cannot overturn one of the definitions of Scripture.

From Acts ii. 22, "A man approved of God," and Gal. iv. 4, "Made of a woman," and Jno. xiv. 28, "My Father is greater than I," it has been attempted to prove Christ to be no more than a man. But we interpose the principle of our rule. A definition of Christ's nature and attributes has been given, and all these and similar passages must be explained accordingly. The definition to which we refer is in Jno. i. 1, 2, 3, Phil. ii. 6–11, Heb. i. 1–14; and a more precise and designedly guarded definition it is impossible to frame, and it must influence the entire record concerning Christ. To interpret

any passage concerning Him, so as to contradict these definitions, would be a wresting of Scripture, a violation of its inspiration. How can it be that the Scriptures are inspired, if they contradict their own positive definitions? The passages above referred to teach the humanity of Christ, it is true; but our position is that a definition of the nature and attributes of our Lord has been given, such as forbids us to limit His nature and attributes to those of mere humanity.

Ps. li. 5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." If these words be interpreted so as to convey the idea that there is corruption or depravity adhering to man's nature, as one of its attributes, innate, hereditary, and causative by necessity of all sin, apart from voluntary choice on the part of the sinner, then this is a contradiction of definitions of sin found in various Scriptures, and is not to be entertained. These definitions give us the only true and allowable conceptions of sin; and from these there must be no departure.

It is remarkable with what clearness the Scriptures define sin. Thus our Lord: Mark vii. 20, "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts," &c. And yet more expressly in ver. 15, "There is nothing from without a man, that

entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man." Sin is something that has its origin in evil thought, in the man's own heart, by the man's own agency, and of which he is the sole author. To the same effect precisely is 1 Jno. iii. 4, "Sin is the transgression of the law;" sin is something which the transgressor performs. So likewise James i. 15, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away *of his own lust*, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The strictest philosophy of the schools could not exceed the precision and sharpness of this definition. All the sin with which any man is chargeable originates in himself, and is acted by himself.

In this definition there is a very general agreement among theologians. The Westminster theologians say, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Their "want of conformity" does not in fact add any new idea to that of transgression. And of original sin itself, they say it is "transgression." Chalmers quotes Jno. iii. 19, v. 40, and vii. 17, to show that whenever guilt is charged on any act or disposition, the *will* of man has always to do with it. Coleridge says, "A state, or act, that has not its origin in the will, may be

calamity, deformity, disease, or mischief, but sin it cannot be." McCosh, p. 340, says, "Sin consists essentially in the will refusing to submit itself to the law of God." Webster says, "Sin is the voluntary departure of a moral agent from a known rule of rectitude, or duty, prescribed by God." This, then, in perfect harmony with the definition of the Scriptures, may be set down as the true and only universal conception of the human mind as to what sin is.

Our rule binds us stringently, in all our interpretations of Scripture, to keep within the definitions which it gives. The force of this principle Augustine certainly felt, when, in the course of his argument with Pelagius, after attempting to define what is meant by original depravity in man, he finally says, "It is nothing substantial, but is a quality of the affections, a weakness." He shrunk from saying it was positively and truly a sin. Common sense thus demands just what the Bible declares, that sin is an act of voluntary disobedience to the will of God; not a quality created in the nature; something acted, not a shadow. If it is regarded as a quality, it cannot be charged on men; and the divine government is not clear concerning it. Here the words of the great theologian, John Howe, rush to our recollection: Vol. I. p. 117, 118, "The notion of the goodness of God, methinks, should stick so close to

our minds, and create such a sense in our souls, as should be infinitely dearer to us than all our senses and powers. And that we should rather choose to have our sight, hearing, motive power, or what not besides, disputed, or even torn away from us, than ever suffer ourselves to be disputed into a belief that the holy and good God should irresistibly determine the will of men to, and punish the same thing. * * For I would appeal to the quick, refined sense of any sober and pious mind, after serious, inward consultation with itself; being closely urged, with the horror of so black a conception of God, that he should be supposed irresistibly to determine the will of a man to the hatred of his own most blessed self, and then to exact severest punishment for the offence done, what relief it would now be to it, to be told in reply that man is, under the law and God above it. A defence that doubles the force of the assault. What! God make a law, and necessitate the violation of it! and yet also punish that violation! And this be thought a sufficient salvo, that Himself is not subject to any law! Will a quick-scented, tender spirit, wounded by so insufferable indignity, offered to a holy God, be any whit eased, or relieved by the thin sophistry of only a collusive ambiguity in the word law? * * Or, what relief is there in that dream of the supposed possibility of God's making a rea-

sonable creature with an innocent aversion to Himself? For what can be supposed more repugnant, or what more impertinent? If innocent, how were it punishable? A law ready made in the case, how can it be innocent?"

It is the notion of the goodness of God that forbids us from travelling out of the record of his Word, on the subject of sin. It compels us to dismiss all theories opposed to its definitions, and content ourselves with the facts of the case. The simple facts in the case, with the Bible's definition before us, are sufficient to explain the nature of sin, and the mystery of its universality. What are the facts? (1) We have a free agent, in every man living. (2) We have a holy law, level to the powers of every man. (3) As constituting sin, we have, last of all, in every case in which sin occurs, the *free choice* of the man's will, contrary to the will of God, and this choice once made, fixes upon the maker the charge of sin; not because of his nature, but because, with a nature such as God was pleased to give him, he freely transgressed the will of God. This is the mystery of sin. An active, free, conscious will, transgressing the law, as Adam did, as the angels did, is enough to account for all the sins, of all the men, and all the angels that ever lived, and sinned, since the days of eternity. See Barnes on James, p. 31.

It has long forced itself on our minds, that the current views on this whole subject have been much influenced, if not actually determined, by the controversies and opinions of the Reformers. Dogmas have a tradition, and a history; we think it is so in this case. The Reformers were under the necessity of debating the great question, *are works meritorious?* The Romanists said, Yes; the Reformers not only answered, No; they laid down the position, *that since the Fall, man cannot obey the law of God at all.* If this could be maintained, it settled the question respecting the merit of works. Man could merit nothing, if he could *do* nothing. Melancthon was so resolute as to make the effort to lodge the doctrine in metaphysics. Said he: "Since whatever happens, happens by necessity, agreeably to the Divine foreknowledge, it is plain that our will has no liberty whatever." Loc. Comm. p. 35. No liberty to love God, or do His will! and that by the predetermined decree of God Himself! How comes that? No matter if the victory is only gained over these Romanists. But was this not buying victory at too dear a rate? In our view, it is by a principle of law that the Romanists are to be refuted, in respect to the question of works. "He that offends in one point, is guilty of all;" he that has sinned,

deserves, and can deserve, nothing but punishment. The sinner is therefore shut up to the faith of Christ, and to salvation as a free gift, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Of the two theories, then, that regard sin, one, as a necessary product of nature, the other, as an act of the will, we decidedly prefer the latter; it is more consistent with Scripture, with the doctrine of accountability, and the decisions of conscience. David did not mean to contradict this theory. He gave utterance to the words in Ps. li. 5, in a state of deep mental agitation. Witness the verse preceding, where he declares he had sinned against God only. Was this literally so? Had he not sinned against his friend, and the wife of his bosom, and against the whole kingdom, and his own conscience? Certainly he had. But how then will you dispose of his words? By pleading the state of his mind. That gave an exaggerated tone to his language; it was the language of deep emotion, of highly-excited penitence, and sorrow. No wonder then at his words. No wonder that he says, he was "shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin." "He wist not what he said." There was no language too strong, or too strange, to express his sense of his conduct. He was willing to say he was a sinner from the moment of

his conception. Witness how emotion, in its highest states, will express itself, even in a cool, theological argument. Gal. iv. 19, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you." Has it ever entered into any sane mind to interpret these words on the same principles of strict literalism, that have been applied to the language of David? No, verily! But we must pervert the whole Scripture, if we bind down our interpretations to the cold letter in such passages. Let us rather preserve our common sense.

There is one significant fact we note. There is not an instance in all the Bible where sin is predicated of any faculty, disposition, propensity, or attribute of man's nature, by itself, as such; it is always predicated of some *person* as exercising the faculty, or disposition. There is always a free moral agent, held accountable for the thing—sin. This is one element of the Bible's definition not to be ignored. Thus writes the venerable Richards (tract on Atonement), "*sin*, *guilt*, *ill-desert* are, in the very nature of things, *personal*." Magee, as quoted by Richards, says: "Guilt and punishment cannot be conceived, but with reference to consciousness which cannot be transferred:" p. 12.

Dr. Woods says, Letters to Unit. p. 44, "Every attempt to prove that God ever imputes to man any

sinful disposition, or act which is not strictly *his own*, has failed of success."

We therefore reiterate our canon, that no interpretation is correct, which violates the definitions of Scripture. It is a law never to be forgotten or transgressed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE ENFORCED.

ALTHOUGH in view of what has been written, every principle essential to a consistent system of Biblical interpretation seems to be embraced, there is yet another worthy of a separate notice, at this particular stage of our labors, and which, because of its great importance and evident bearing on the whole subject, may well receive an extended illustration and defence at our hands.

It is this: as respects all knowledge in the department of religion and morals, the Bible is a source of information beyond which no human mind can advance, unassisted of God, while in this world.

There is a constant and perhaps a constitutional tendency in the human mind to travel into the regions of the mysterious and the unknown; or, which amounts to the same thing, into regions altogether beyond those which the Bible has revealed.

Men are not disposed to content themselves within the limits assigned them by Divine wisdom. They venture, they know not why, into regions, where no inspired writer ever dared to set his foot. But it need hardly be said, all such wanderings have proved only vanity and vexation of spirit. There are good reasons why God has set bounds, saying, to the adventurous mind of man, as he did of old to the sea, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no further."

Of this we might mention many notable examples; but, one or two must suffice. One is in reference to what has been called "the conflict of ages," or, the accounting for the universality of sin in our world. Not content with tracing it to Adam, a recent writer, following the example of two or three before him, undertakes to prove that it is traceable to the pre-existence and sins of men, in a world before the present; in that previous world mankind all lived and sinned; and for their sins, they are here involved in sin and chastisement! This is all extra—the Bible; it is a series of ideas which the Bible has nowhere expressed. And yet a desire to have the Bible on his side, has led this writer to a vigorous effort to find at least one text to support him. He undertakes to interpret Rom. v. 12, so as to favor his theory: "Wherefore as by

one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Some will have it, as a deduction, from the last clause of this verse, that all men existed, acted, sinned and died in the one person, Adam; but this writer will make a stranger deduction still, viz.: that these words prove that all men existed, acted, sinned, and fell before Adam was created! There is not much to choose between the two theories; one is pre-existence since Adam, the other pre-existence before Adam. But these words of Paul are fatal to the position that men sinned in a previous world. For, as they read, man was in the world before sin was in it, because sin did not exist, until man produced it. Being innocent, he was tempted, and yielded; and for the first time, sin was in the world. This was after his creation, consequently neither man, nor man's sins, existed in a previous state. This is the field of man's first being, and man's first sins; unless, indeed, we travel beyond the limits of the Bible, and when once beyond these limits, the unknown is all before us, like the wide, wide sea!

Another example of this same tendency is furnished by the Romanists, in their dogma of the immaculate conception. Of this dogma, there is positively, on their own admission, not a syllable of

proof in the Bible. Yet in the year A.D. 1854, what do we see—the whole hierarchy of the Popish church, assembled to assert that the Mother of our Lord was conceived and born without taint of sin! Doctrinally, there may be no objections to this dogma; because, for anything that appears, all men may have been conceived and born without taint of sin. Sin is the transgression of the law, and attaches only to those who have committed it. The error lies in their declaring the dogma as matter of faith for the first time, and especially in reference to that one individual, thus claiming for it the apparent authority of the Scriptures. On this point, as on the whole subject of man's character, the Scriptures are true to the great principle of going no further in theory than the facts allow. The facts in the case are, that no creature is a sinner until he sins; that no taint of sin, no appearance of guilt belongs to any creature until it is contracted by actual conduct. And in this we desire most steadfastly to rest. Because the Bible rests here, and it is the criterion of all religious and moral truth, the limit of all human knowledge on these subjects. This is our stand-point, and as Luther said, "We cannot move from it; may God help us!" Our principle is, when we have reached the meaning of the Bible, we have reached the furthest limit of knowledge. To pre-

tend we can go further is a vain pretence. The Bible is the *ultima ratio* of all doctrine. Beyond its teachings there is nothing certain. Only grant that the human mind can rise higher than the Bible, into the regions of truth, and what next? The next position will be, that the Bible is defective. Against this we enter a solemn protest. Once more we adopt the sentiment of the great reformer: "I have a book"—said Luther—"which is my creed; that is my Bible; there I rest, and wish nothing beyond."

The mischief attending the neglect of our fundamental principle is not merely an occasional error, it is the necessary perversion of the Scriptures to which it leads. Those who go beyond its revelations, are somehow usually very desirous to gain its support to their vagaries. This is the fact with him who argues for the pre-existence of the race; and it is notoriously the fact with the Romanists, who are constantly perverting Scripture to favor their peculiar doctrines. The consequence of all such efforts is a confirmed habit, ever strengthening, of misinterpreting the Scriptures, until the integrity of revelation is wholly destroyed.

But our fundamental principle puts an end to all this. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to these, it is because there is

no truth in them." The Bible in its unapproachable majesty and completeness is worthy of the undisputed dominion and reverence of the human mind. It is the voice of the Eternal and all-wise God.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE AUTHORITY OF LEXICONS, AND ETYMOLOGY IN THE WORK OF INTERPRETATION.

The connection of this topic with the science of Interpretation is so close, that we cannot pass it by. Students especially are in danger of regarding their lexicons as infallible, and of supposing that if they trace a word to its root, they thus arrive at a meaning which cannot be disputed. In this they may find themselves deceived.

What is the measure of authority to be conceded to lexicons? is a question every independent mind will not fail to raise and answer for itself.

We would say, then, in reply, the measure of authority to be conceded to lexicons of the Old and New Testaments, is the measure of their accuracy in their definitions, and no more. While we say this, it is with unfeigned pleasure we here express our conviction, that in no department of sacred literature has there been such admirable progress made,

as in lexicography. In the hands of Dr. Edward Robinson, it has attained the ripe condition of a science, the principles of which are definitely settled. What Webster has done for English, Robinson has done for the Hebrew of the Old, and the Greek of the New Testament.

The older lexicons, common twenty-five years ago, were defective, because compiled on principles inconsistent with a natural and logical definition of words. In lexicons worthy of being used in the work of exegesis, the primary sense of the word is first given, with quotations of passages in which it occurs. Then follow the secondary, or metaphorical significations, with proof passages, as before, clearly showing that the primary sense of the words has been changed. In such lexicons, the governing principle is that of correct reasoning and the known nature of the subject, proceeding from a strictly physical, to a spiritual, or moral signification. If these definitions are correct, if they represent fairly the use of words, they have authority; otherwise they have none.

Lexicons cannot create new meanings and impose them on words; their office is to unfold truthfully the meaning which words have already received at the hands of usage. In their nature, therefore, they are nothing more nor less than abbreviated com-

mentaries on the Scriptures; records of results; and these results are simply interpretations or decisions, on the part of the lexicographer, of the meaning of Scripture, as he views it; and hence they are neither final nor infallible. Every definition is to be tested, as we test the meaning of the Bible itself. The appeal is to the Scriptures, and to those rules of ascertaining its sense, to which all men must submit, because they are fundamental and independent. Hence we are led to remark of lexicons, as before we have done of commentaries, that the best lexicon of the Bible is, beyond all dispute, just the Bible itself, rightly interpreted.

In respect to etymology, this is often appealed to as a very important help in arriving at the true sense of Scripture; and it must be admitted that the source whence a word is derived, often throws surprising light on an obscure passage; and this assistance ought to be furnished by every good lexicon. In many instances the root of a word is all but indispensable. Yet we are by no means to suppose it infallible; for through the capriciousness of usage, it is often of no value whatever. Usage may almost be said to control etymology. In all languages this is true. For example, in English the word "villain" in its root means merely a villager, without reference to character. Now it is applied to a man of bad

character only. So in hundreds of instances; so that usage may be said to set all roots at defiance.

And yet the primary derivation of words is sometimes the only effectual method of settling the sense of a disputed passage. Thus the elements of the Greek word for "repent," Mat. iv. 17, show beyond the shadow of a doubt, that our Lord did not mean "do penance," but "change your minds, and lead a new life." The derivation of "deacon," 1 Tim. 3–8, and wherever it occurs, proves it does not signify a candidate for the pulpit, but "a steward of the poor." Acts viii. 33, "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away;" here the original word for "judgment" shows it was not his mind, but his just sentence that was denied him. Acts xv. 41, "And he went through Syria and Celicia confirming the churches;" the word for "confirming" used also in Acts xiv. 22, and xviii. 23, proves that apostolic confirmation was not that confirmation now practised in Romanist and Episcopal Churches. There is no word for Episcopal confirmation in the Scriptures, for the good reason, that the thing itself was not practised or known in apostolic and Scriptural times. The apostles confirmed the churches, not candidates for admission to the churches; and their confirmation was not the laying on of hands, but the preach-

ing of the doctrines of the Gospel, whereby the minds of the saints were confirmed in the faith of Christ.

The original for "ordained," in Acts xiv. 23, proves beyond question, that the elders were chosen or appointed by vote of the churches, in open meeting assembled, and not by the laying on of a bishop's hands. This choice by the church is what the word expresses.

The Greek for "carriages," Acts xxi. 15, will at once explain, that it was not their vehicles that the apostles took up, but their baggage and such things as were needful for a foot journey over the mountains to Jerusalem.

These and many more illustrations that might be given, will show what is the value of etymology, in this science. Wisely used, it is a most important help, which every student will more appreciate, the more he gives it his attention.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE STUDY OF THE PROPHECIES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION.

As we have already said, it was not our intention to enter into all the details of this science, nor to attempt the exhibition of a series of rules for all the separate departments of Scripture. What we did intend to present, was a comprehensive system of general principles, which, when honestly applied, might guide sincere inquirers to an understanding of the main difficulties of the Word of God; such a system, it is hoped, we have supplied. We do not say it is complete; we hope it is sound and reliable, so far as it goes. Dr. Davidson, of England, has pointed out very clearly, the characteristics which all rules of interpretation should possess. He says: "Our rules should approach, as nearly as possible, to the nature of axioms. All reasoning proceeds on certain data, that must be taken for granted, as self-evident, or such as the human mind is at once dis-

posed to receive. This holds good in mathematics it is the case in mental philosophy; it is true of all sciences. Canons of interpretation should, therefore, nearly correspond to axioms, and be equally obvious to the perception of all. They ought not to be the result of speculation, or the far-fetched deductions of reason. Rather should they be axioms lying at the foundation of religious truth. If there be much room to question their reality, they will never serve important and valuable purposes. The stamp and impress of common sense, must be on their foreheads." Sac. Her. p. 613. See also Barnes on Gal. p. 373.

These sentiments harmonize entirely with our whole design in the present work; they lay bare the foundation of the system here presented. We sincerely hope common sense is impressed on every rule and axiom we have here laid down. If the series of rules be incomplete, if some of the series be open to objection, and it would be a marvel if neither supposition were true; yet so far as the main difficulties and demands of the science are concerned, we confidently insist that the axioms and rules laid down, are such as cannot be proved inappropriate, or unworthy of the position assigned them. They are such as apply in all good faith, to the Sacred Scrip-

tures, as one grand, self-consistent revelation of the will of God.

And while, therefore, we regard the Bible as one Book, to be interpreted according to these rules, in all the variety of its departments, of poetry, and of prose, of history, and parable, and plain didactic discourse; still there are one or two of these departments which seem to demand some special interpretation. One of these is prophecy; and many considerations at once present themselves, showing that as a special portion of the Word of God, it requires special attention, both in its study, and in its explanation.

A very large proportion of the Bible consists of prophecy, and prophecy is occupied with themes of immense and constantly increasing importance to the Church, and the world. A certain, natural, and we might say, most useful, obscurity hangs over it. It is one of the great sources of evidence, in the argument for the Divine origin of the Bible. There is very great diversity of opinion in regard to many of its most important disclosures. Its language is highly figurative, and susceptible of a very great latitude in its explication. For these reasons, it seems every way appropriate, and necessary, that we attempt to lay down some general principles,

expressly to regu ate our study of prophecy, and our efforts at its explanation. Not that we give any countenance to the favorite notion of some, that every distinct species of composition needs a special system of rules; not that we would not place prophecy, in the main, under the general principles applicable to all Scripture. But as one of the most prominent and interesting departments of the Bible, it may be well to give it more than a general consideration, and to note some of the special maxims, which, by nature, apply to it. All the more impressively does this whole subject commend itself to our serious regards, inasmuch as there is a remarkable and revived tendency, in some of the leading writers and preachers of the day, to advance unsound and startling views, as derived from prophecy, of the future history of the Gospel, and of the world. At this moment, it would seem as though the wildest notions of the tenth century, concerning the personal coming of Christ, and the end of the wicked, were again to become current. Is Christ about to come in person, to reign in Jerusalem, in the year 1865? Are all the pious dead to be raised, and reign with our Lord in Palestine, for a thousand years? Are all the impenitent, living at our Lord's coming, to be literally and instantaneously destroyed by fire? Are they to remain in the grave a thousand years, and

then rise and assault the city of the saints? And are there indeed two resurrection days—one at the coming of Christ, and the other one thousand years after? Is the beginning of these things so near at hand, only ten years distant, from this day? And are they clearly taught in the prophets of the Old and New Testaments? Many answer these questions in the affirmative; and if these events are at hand, surely it behooves us to give all diligence to the important work of studying this grand department of the Sacred Scriptures. We therefore proceed to lay down some general principles to govern us in our work.

I.—One of the first principles we specify, in regard to the study and interpretation of the prophecies, is that they can be understood.

And we insist on this all the more strenuously, since it has been reiterated with such apparent sincerity, that the prophecies are dark and unintelligible. If this were so, it would prove the greater part of the Bible to be unintelligible; a conclusion in which no intelligent mind can rest. The greater part of the Bible consists of prophecy, and this not as a matter of chance, but as a wise and well-ordered purpose of Divine goodness. It was decreed so to be, to satisfy a felt want in the human soul. For through all time

and under all dispensations, man needs satisfactory proof of the special interposition of God in the affairs of this world. It is not necessary that we should show why this is so. The want certainly exists. To satisfy it in early ages, miracles were performed; and, in these days, prophecy, a miracle constantly performming, is designed to satisfy it still. Owing to the nature of man, and to the subjective effects of sin upon his heart, man is wholly dependent on the evidence that may be afforded him from time to time, of the divine attributes, and of the divine government over him. Without that evidence, he lapses into atheism and is miserable. In his best estate, surrounded, as he is, with a strongly sensuous nature, man will continue to ask, as did Gideon of old, for some sign that God is with him. And therefore it has been practically said to him, that he may have such a sign until the end of time, if he will but study the prophecies. In these Scriptures he cannot fail to see the finger of God. How wonderful and convincing is the demonstration here given, from the earliest time to the present hour, of the existence, power, wisdom, holiness and sovereignty of God! If such, then, be the design of prophecy, how does it appear that it is unintelligible?

To evade the force of this question, it is said prophecy cannot be fully understood till the time of its

fulfillment. But this is only an evasion. If prophecy cannot be understood till it is actually fulfilled, we ask how, in such a case, can it be properly prophecy at all, in any just sense of the word. To be prophecy, it must be intelligible, from the first moment of its utterance; that is, it must be understood that something is foretold; and some idea of the time, manner of its fulfillment, and of the object of its prediction, must be imparted; for all these items enter into the very nature of a prophecy. We grant all the details of any one prophecy may not be fully understood until after its accomplishment; but that prophecy cannot be understood, as a general proposition, we do not grant; for thus we would ignore the inspiration of the Scriptures.

In reference to this point, we submit a question, which must have suggested itself to every one that has ever read the prophecies of the Bible. It is this: who were they to whom prophecy was at first addressed? Were they the scholars of the world, the men of deep research and immense erudition, of whom we hear in modern times, as possessing all the competency to master this grand department of sacred interpretation? To limit this inquiry still more, who were the men to whom the last and most difficult book of prophecy was addressed? Whoever they were, be it remembered, it was sent to them without note or com-

ment. The Revelation was sent to the plain, unlettered people of Ephesus and Smyrna, who had been not long converted from the gross superstitions of heathenism. But this book, though confessedly so difficult, was designed to be the great telescope of the Christian Church, by help of which she was to penetrate distant ages, and trace the wonder-working hand of God, down to the era of the grand consummation. And it was put into the possession of these plain, unlettered converts, at Ephesus and Smyrna, without one word of distrust of their capacity to read and understand it. Yea, a blessing is pronounced on those who do read and understand it. How, then, does this fact bear on the point before us? In our judgment it settles the question, that the prophecies can be understood.

It is in the firm faith, therefore, of this position, that we would have every reader and student of prophecy to proceed. The prophecies can be made to subserve the noblest purposes of comforting, confirming and enlightening the mind in the principles of pure and undefiled religion. And this result is to be reached by their correct interpretation. The same spirit that speaks in all the precepts, speaks also in all the prophecies, so as to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

II.—A second general principle to be adopted is, that like all other portions of Sacred Scripture, the prophecies have but one meaning to convey.

It has been, and now is, one of the most fertile sources of error, respecting many of the prophecies, that they have been supposed to contain, and designedly to teach, two distinct meanings, under one and the same form of words; that they foretell two events, where the language clearly foretells only one. But there cannot be anything more unfounded. It is inconsistent with some of the fundamental maxims of a sound interpretation; which maxims, if we once abandon, all hope of a correct interpretation must be given up.

We say the prophecies have one intended meaning, and one fulfillment, and no more. But in laying down this position, we do not forget that they may have many re-illustrations, in the same manner as the proverbs. The meaning of every proverb is single, not double; one, and not many. But notwithstanding, every proverb may have its one meaning reaffirmed thousands of times. So it is with the prophecies. Take for instance Is. vi. 9, "And

he said, go and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." Here, then, was a prediction of the continued obstinacy and unbelief of the Jews in the times of Isaiah; and it was a prediction fulfilled in his times. But in Jno. xii. 37, we find our Lord applying it to the people of His day, who refused to believe or obey Him; and He styles the then state of the Jews, a fulfillment of this very prediction. Again, in Acts xxviii. 26, Paul makes still another application of it to the people of his time, in Rome. Here there would be a *triple* sense in the above prophecy, if we admitted the principle against which we contend. But surely Isaiah did not in this case predict all these three events; nor did he have before his eye more than one, and that one transpired in his own lifetime.

On what principle, then, it may be asked, was the prophecy applied to the nation, in the other two instances? We answer, there was a similarity in the circumstances, by which the application was justified. In each case, the messenger of God was resisted, and his message treated with contempt. The historic events, therefore, resembled each other; as in the days of Isaiah, when his message was rejected, and the people hardened themselves in impenitence, so it was in the days of our Lord and of

Paul. They to whom the Word of God came, refused to hear it, and hardened themselves in their sins. But there was nothing in all this to justify the idea of a *double* sense in the prophecy. That prophecy may be re-fulfilled; *i.e.*, re-exemplified a thousand times, and yet its meaning is primarily and unchangeably one.

This is the key to the phrase, so often occurring in Matthew; "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." Its force in many instances is equivalent to, "Thus again was verified what the prophet of old predicted." There are indeed instances in Matthew and in the other evangelists, where the above phrase is applied to positive predictions of the events recorded; but these instances are few, and can be easily distinguished from those of the other class.

Under this head come the Messianic Psalms; or at least some of the Psalms generally considered as prophetic of the Messiah. In our view, the meaning of many of these Psalms was exhausted in their first and intended fulfillment; but in the person, character, and office of our Lord, they had a more glorious illustration; and therefore, what was originally applicable to David, or Solomon, became again more illustriously true of the Messiah. Of this it were easy to point out several examples; while on the other hand,

there are other Psalms, where the prophecy is purely Messianic; pointing to Christ from the first, and having all its meaning fulfilled in Him. Of course a sound discretion alone will guide us to a knowledge of these Psalms. It is perhaps impossible to decide in every case the precise limit within which the meaning of such Psalms is to be applied to the Redeemer. The tendency has been to apply more of the Psalms generally to Him, than was ever intended, in our opinion, by the Holy Spirit. Indeed it was laid down as a canon of interpretation, that all the Scripture that could be applied to Him, *must* be applied to Him; and from this false principle, many interpreters have not escaped to this day.

The distinction which we have raised between the primary and designed sense of prophecy, and the many re-illustrations which it has in history, must never be forgotten. It relieves the whole difficulty in which this vexed question of the double sense has been involved; and saves us from adopting a sentiment which would reduce a large portion of the Bible to a level with the oracles of Greece and Rome. Prophecy was intended as a sign from God, of the authority and truth of His Word. As such, therefore, its meaning is simple, determinate, and intelligible. It is not *double*. In every particular, it conforms to the character and law of Him who

gave it. It is not yea and nay; but yea, yea; and nay, nay. "With open face," says Moses Stuart, "we ask, where is the proof that either prophecy, or any other part of the Old Testament, or of the New, conveys a double sense? Where is the authority for deciding what the occult sense is, or must be? Where is the defence for trampling upon all the laws of interpretation, applicable to all other books, when we come to expound the Scriptures? In the name of all that is grave, serious, rational, intellectual, respectful to God's eternal truth, or intelligible in propounding the way of salvation to men, I protest against such an abuse of reason, of the Holy Scriptures, and of all the established principles of language."—*Hints on Prop.*, *p.* 40.

We think no candid reader will reject these sentiments. On no other ground can the veracity and authority of the Scriptures be maintained. There are no difficulties yet discovered, great enough to compel us to depart from these sentiments for one instant. We do not here undertake to say there are no difficulties or obscurities connected with this subject. But we do undertake to hold on to the oneness and simplicity of sense in all the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, whether prophetic or didactic, or historic. This is a fundamental principle, necessary to the unity, dignity, intelligibility, and Divine origin of the

Bible. Let the meaning of the prophecy be ascertained, and let the event it predicts be determined, and there let us rest. If there be one, or one thousand other events, in which all the principal features of the prophecy re-appear, as in the multitudinous affairs of human life, there must often occur transactions similar almost in every respect to others going before; let not the simplicity of the Scripture be sacrificed on that account. There is nothing new under the sun. But the sense of prophecy, like the sense of the precepts, is one, and its fulfillment one. The "Westminster Confession" has these weighty sentiments on this point: Chap. I., Sect. 9, "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

III.—A third general direction for the student and interpreter of prophecy is, that he investigate first, the prophecies already fulfilled; the better will he understand those yet in process of fulfillment.

This we insist on, as a very important preliminary to this difficult department of Scriptural interpretation. To rush at once on the unfulfilled prophecies,

the most profoundly difficult portions of the Bible without any understanding of the symbolic language peculiar to the prophets, and without having studied the manner of the prophets, in those instances in which their predictions have been actually fulfilled—what could more certainly lead to error? In all sciences, the first step is to acquire the elements. So it ought to be here; for the fulfilled prophecies are in fact, the elements of prophetic interpretation; and therefore necessary first of all, to be carefully studied.

It is a very easy matter to be a blunderer in this department. We have seen a sect spring into existence, from the ill-guided haste of a very obscure, and unlearned person, who, without a moment's consideration, rushed upon the interpretation of Daniel and John, as though he had fully studied prophecy in all its departments. Questions which the wisest and most erudite of students had hesitated to answer with a humble caution, he presumed to settle with the most absolute certainty. Where the difficulties of the subject should have led him to speak with modesty, there he was confident. The result was the most signal failure of all his predictions, and the insanity of many of his followers. Indeed, the highway of history is strewed with the wreck of those who have perished in such delusions. In every

country, and in every age, there have been those, who, disregarding the maxims of sound sense, have boldly advanced to conclusions, at variance with all reason, with the most obvious teachings of the Word of God; until it has passed into a proverb, that the study of prophecy, if it does not find a man insane, generally leaves him so.

But nothing could be more unwarranted. The study of the prophecies, is the study of the inspired Word of God. Let it be conducted with prayer, and sound common sense, and the result will be comfort, increase in knowledge, and in all the graces of the Christian character.

The point on which we now insist, is that fulfilled prophecy be first studied as a preparatory labor, for the purpose of acquiring skill, the meaning of symbols, the spirit of the prophets, and the peculiarities of their style. The reasonableness of such a course will be admitted at once.

And connected with this general direction, is the careful separation of the fulfilled, from the unfulfilled prophecies. No error can be more serious than that of confounding these separate divisions of Scripture. Alas! how often it is committed! For example, the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, foretelling the return of the Jews from Babylon, are made to predict events yet to come, in these last ages of

the world, even the return of all the Jews to Palestine, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the personal coming of Christ, to reign over the whole world, as its sole monarch, for a thousand years! These interpreters, with immense show of learning, insist upon what they style "a strictly literal sense" in the prophecies. They will hear of no figurative, or spiritual interpretation. It must be *ad literam*, or it is false. And they have zeal and importance in various ways to be a very influential party in the literary world, although there is one fact rather ominous—they are not generally men in living sympathy with the active and missionary masses in the Church. They are either literary men, or popular preachers of a certain type, whose affinities are more with the study and the lamp, than with the busy, practical world. This fact may account somewhat for their opinions. There is such a thing as looking at the sun, until we become blind. So there may be a morbid attention to a favorite topic, until the mind loses somewhat of its just balance, and cannot discern its own errors. Yet some of these men have been, and are now, the noblest specimens of earnestness, and evangelical devotion to the Gospel. It was of a chieftain of this class, that the renowned Dr. Chalmers, after listening to his discourse on some prophetic theme, remarked, with a significant shrug

of the shoulders, "the man has a prodigious imagination!" From the experience of the past, we have come to suspect this class of interpreters of that same capacity. But "a prodigious imagination" is not the best qualification for the interpreter of the prophets. A strict and cautious judgment is of more real value; and it is required at every step, in the separation of the two great divisions of the fulfilled, and the unfulfilled predictions.

It will be understood that by a fulfilled prophecy we mean one that is actually completed, such as the coming of Christ, to die for the sins of the world, or the return of the Jews from the captivity. There are also prophecies in the process of fulfillment, and others still whose accomplishment has not yet commenced. These are all to be carefully, and constantly distinguished from those wholly fulfilled.

IV. A fourth principle to guide us in the interpretation of the prophets is, that the Bible itself is the proper source of the laws applicable to this department of the Sacred Volume.

We have often heard the idea advanced that the key of many of the prophecies is to be discovered among the hieroglyphics of Egypt, or of Nineveh, or among the ancient ruins of the East. But our belief is that this lost key is to be found in the Bible itself.

This follows from the fundamental maxim that the Bible can make plain its own meaning, independent of all extrinsic considerations. Beyond all doubt it contains the only true and safe principles of prophetic interpretation. To ascertain these principles, we believe the process is this: from the record carefully ascertain the contents of the prophecy; note the symbols employed, if any, and their signification as given in the Scriptures; and finally make sure of the time, or age, in which the event, or events, are to take place. On all these points the Bible is our only reliable source of information. Because prophecy having been designed to be understood, everything needful to its being understood has been provided by Divine wisdom in the record. An honest purpose, a prayerful heart, a discreet and cool judgment and an open Bible, are all that we need to ensure a wise and useful interpretation of these deep mysteries.

Our position above defined does not exclude the use of general history. Indeed, after the close of Revelation, history is the only source within our reach, from which we can ascertain the fulfillment of many of the prophecies. Here we cannot but call attention to the admirable use made by Barnes, in his "Notes on Revelation," of the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." His quo-

tations from Gibbon, as illustrating the predictions of John, are very striking. They could not fail to throw a very singular light on that wonderful book. For granting, as we must, that the book of Revelation is a comprehensive prediction of the leading events in history, from the promulgation of the Gospel, to the end of the world, it follows, of course, that history must be in fact, nothing more or less than the fulfilling of that mysterious book. But this is true of all history. It is the fulfillment of the prophecies, and therefore must be diligently consulted in the interpretation of them.

And here has been one great source of error, in the misapplication of history; sometimes through a too precipitate desire of finding a fulfillment, and more frequently, perhaps, through a failure to ascertain the chronology of the prophecy, *i. e.*, the time, or age of the world, in which the completion of the prediction chronologically falls. This last point is to be ascertained by a careful attention to the events predicted, the time from which the prediction begins, and the date of its intended end—most essential particulars these to the interpreter.

The prophets, as a general fact, keep strictly in their view, the order of time, in which the events foretold, will take place; and to mistake that order of time is a most infallible method of going astray.

There is also a similarity of events and their causes in different and distant ages of the world, which makes it easy to fall into error. Wars, ambition, intrigues, pride, revolutions, vice, are everywhere alike, as are the sources whence they spring. But it ought to be borne in mind, that prophecy has not foretold every outburst of vice, nor yet every revolution, or apostasy from the faith of Christ. To ascertain what it has foretold, we must keep our eye on the periods within which it has confined its predictions. Events predicted to occur in the first century, we must look for in the first century; and should events every way similar occur in the nineteenth, and apparently from the same causes, yet we would wrest the Scripture wholly from its design, did we insist on applying the prophecy to events for which it never was intended.

Every prophecy has its time and expires with it. So also, if a prophecy respect a particular country, or region, the fulfillment must be sought for in that region and in no other. But in respect to all these particulars the Bible is the only competent authority, and hence it is in the Bible that we are to seek for all the elements of a sound and safe interpretation of the prophecies. It has the key of its own mysteries.

V. Another step of essential importance is the perusal of the contemporaneous history of the prophets, in the historical books.

These books ought to be read and thoroughly studied, as the very best possible preparation for the work of interpreting the prophets. They develop the events out of which the mission of the prophets had its rise; they detail both the occasion of the prediction, and the time of its fulfillment. There we learn that the prophets were raised up for the emergencies in which they lived; that they had a special errand to fulfill, and that they actually fulfilled it. Their messages therefore, and the visions of futurity vouchsafed to them, had an adaptation very close and specific to the work on which they came. They were not sent to prophecy of the distant future, only as that future gave courage and hope to the people immediately before them, who heard their utterances, and for whose special benefit they were sent of God. It is a common error of the present day, as it has been of past times, to regard the prophets, not as speaking and writing for the men of their own day, and of events passing immediately before them; but as writing and speaking indefinitely and always of the ages to come. This error is the parent of many others. There is not a prophet on the inspired roll, but who had his special

errand to the men of his own generation; and if the distant future and its events were revealed to him, it was simply as a motive to repentance, or as a cause of hope and joy, to those whom he immediately addressed. Hence every book of prophecy, in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, has its special adaptation to its own times. There is no understanding of these books, therefore, without making ourselves familiar with the history of the particular crisis in which they were written. The vices that prevailed, the errors of doctrine, the dangers that threatened the nation, the condition and designs of the kingdoms around them, the maturity of the Divine purposes at the time in which the prophets lived, all these gave a certain coloring to the labors, and sentiments, and visions of these messengers of God; so that to neglect the contemporaneous history of the prophets is the most certain way to misunderstand them altogether.

We subjoin a table of the order in which the prophets lived, and of the times during which they prophesied, so that the corresponding histories in Kings and Chronicles may be read along with their writings.

			KINGS OF JUDAH.	KINGS OF ISRAEL.
1	Jonah	B. C. 856—784		Jehu
2	Amos	" 810—785	Uzziah	Jeroboam II.
3	Hosea	" 810—725	Uzziah, Jotham, &c.	"
4	Isaiah	" 810—698	" "	
5	Joel	" 810—660	Manassah	
6	Micah	" 758—690	Jotham, Ahaz, &c.	Pekah and Hosea
7	Nahum	" 720—698	Hezekiah	
8	Zephaniah	" 640—609	Josiah	
9	Jeremiah	" 628—586	"	
10	Habakkuk	" 612—598	Jehoiakim	
11	Daniel	" 606—534	The Captivity	
12	Obadiah	" 588—583		
13	Ezekiel	" 595—536	Part of the Captivity	
14	Haggai	" 520—518	After the return	
15	Zechariah	" " "	" "	
16	Malachi	" 436—397	" "	

VI. Another step in this work, is the careful comparison of parallel prophecies.

By parallel prophecies we mean the writings of different prophets, foretelling the same events. Like the evangelists, the prophets often traverse the same ground, not as copying each other, but as independent witnesses for the truth; and, therefore, according to a former position, they are the best guides to the right understanding of their communications. Placed side by side, these parallel prophecies cannot fail to throw a strong mutual light on each other. What is doubtful or obscure in one, may be plain and obvious in another: where one is brief, another may be full and satisfactory: where one presents only some dark symbol of an event, his successor may lead you at once to the event predicted without the intervention of a symbol.

The greatest care, of course, will be required in making out the list of the parallel prophecies. The parallelism must be clearly established. A mere resemblance to the language employed will not suffice. All the various particulars in each prophecy must be compared, such as time, place, and object; and the agreement must be evident. Thus, no one can institute a comparison between the seventh chapter of Daniel and the seventeenth of Revelation, without being convinced that they are predictions of the same general events. The symbols are similar; the language also, and the results are so entirely alike, that we cannot doubt but they describe the same historic occurrences.

This faithful comparison of parallel passages was a work, which, according to the title of his book, Dr. Keith should have accomplished. He styles it "The Harmony of Prophecy." But owing to a vicious neglect of the chronology of the prophecies, and a system of interpretation destitute of all appearance of consistency, he has only confounded all harmony. The reader of that work must think the prophets hopelessly at variance with each other; and instead of admiring the unity of their predictions, he must feel wearied and grieved with their inexplicable perplexities. Such books do incredible injury to the cause of Biblical investigation. The impression they

convey is, that the whole subject is incoherent and incapable of comprehension; and this unspeakably precious and instructive portion of the Word of God, is, therefore, often regarded as repulsive and barren in the highest degree, even to many who regard it worthy of all faith.

The number of prophecies unfulfilled, that are parallel prophecies, is not great; the student, therefore, may enter upon this labor, relieved from the fear that the undertaking is likely to be very arduous. Any common reader of the Bible may accomplish it with no other help than the common references to parallel texts; and the effort will well repay his attention.

ON THE CALCULATIONS RESPECTING THE END OF THE WORLD.

All readers of the Bible know that there have been, at various times, very strenuous efforts made, from certain passages in Daniel and John, to calculate the precise year in which the present world is to end. The history of these efforts, from the days of the apostles until now, would fill many large volumes; but whether a recital of all the miserable failures that have been made, would prevent the repetition of such efforts in time to come, is very doubtful.

Only a few years ago, the year and the day were confidently fixed when the trumpet should sound, and the voice of the Son of God be heard calling the world to judgment. It is only as yesterday that the eloquent Irving, with saintly and joyous countenance, was wont to stand for hours together on his balcony, looking towards the east, momentarily expecting to see the glorious white throne, and the retinue of attending angels, and the ever-blessed Redeemer coming in the glory of the Father, to judge the living and the dead. And now another prophet has risen up, and by him we are confidently assured, from a devout and prayerful study of the prophets, that the second coming of Christ, and the end of the present system, will probably take place in 1865. The data of this and all other similar calculations are found in Dan. xii. 11, compared with Rev. xii. 5, and xiii. 18, and Rev. xx. 4.

But by a cursory inspection of these passages, it will be seen that any calculation of the year when this world shall end, must be very, if not purely, arbitrary, inasmuch as there is no direct reference to that event in these passages whatever. All that the Bible justifies us in believing respecting the termination of this present world is, that there is a certain grand moral result to be reached in the history of our race, a general dispersion of the igno-

rance of men, and a triumph over the wickedness that reigns in the earth; and that after an extended period of peace and holiness, very suddenly and unexpectedly, the angel of God will summon both the living and the dead to judgment. Then will come the end; the dissolution of this present system, in liquid fire, and the final retribution of the last day, dispensed in righteousness, by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot follow this topic in all its details; but in the briefest manner, we shall put on record some general remarks for the guidance of the reader:

1. The data from which calculations are made respecting the dissolution of this world, are not clear. They are capable of very different applications. That they furnish any very reliable grounds, therefore, for accurately fixing the year and day of this world's destruction, is more than doubtful.

2. But that there will be a time in the future, when this world in all its families, shall be arrested by the voice of the angel of God, proclaiming, that time shall be no more, is certain—certain, as any future event can be. God has so decreed, both the event, and the agency by which it is to be accomplished, and has given the world due warning of it in the infallible Oracles of His will.

3. The coming of such a day has been the unin-

terrupted belief of all the pious in every age of the world, since the beginning. It is implied in the very nature of that system of moral government, which God has established over man; that system cannot be perfected without the positive occurrence of just such a day.

4. The great epochs of the world's history, and the moral changes to take place in it, the triumph of the Gospel and the overthrow of Satan's kingdom, as introductory to the scenes and issues of the last day, have been clearly marked out in the prophets, both of the Old and the New Testaments. The order of these great events can be distinctly and satisfactorily traced, perhaps not to the point of absolute certainty as to the year of their commencement, or their close, but certainly as far as respects the fact and order of their occurrence. And this is enough to justify the devout and earnest study of the subject, by all who desire to know the fortunes awaiting our world in the flight of future years.

5. All calculations of the times in which these great events are to transpire, should be made in a cautious and modest spirit, as fully aware of the difficulties of the subject, and of the many failures that have already been made in respect to them in past ages. Many have outlived the year and the day,

which they had confidently foretold as the last day of the world.

6. It is expressly said in Mat. xxiv. 36, "Of that day—*i. e.* the day of final judgment—and of that hour, knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." This declaration from our Saviour's lips, makes it certain that the prophets have not revealed the day of judgment, in any such manner as to enable us to fix, with any certainty, the year of its occurrence. Our Lord gives us to understand, not simply that men and angels do not know when it shall be, but that they cannot by any means find it out. The data, then, in the prophets cannot furnish us with any infallible discoveries on the subject. As we have already said, the great eras of our world's history they have clearly foretold, in their order and issues; but, if the words of our Lord are true, we cannot find out from any source, and of course not from the prophets, the precise year when this world shall end.

7. It follows, therefore, that all such calculations as those to which we refer are to be viewed with suspicion. They are not worthy of our confidence, because they rest on no reliable data. Neither do they add any new motives to the obligations of a holy life. The duties of repentance towards God and of faith in Christ, and of a holy life, are not

dependent on any such events, and never, in the Bible, are they urged upon men's hearts on any such grounds. This is one of the strongest considerations, going to show that such calculations ought never to be made. Acts i. 7, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own power."

These general principles and directions will render the study of the prophets, we are confident, both easy and attractive; and none that pursue this study will ever regret the time or labor it may cost them. It is an exercise akin to the highest pleasures of science. It imparts a comfort to the soul every way peculiar; for as we follow the wonderful footsteps of the prophet, far down into distant ages, we still see a holy God on the throne, sin disappearing, and holiness becoming more and more the glory of the universe. We are carried forward to scenes grand and impressive, in which righteousness and truth are ever in the ascendant. The problem of this world's history is solved; solved amid the anthems of the redeemed, and the praises of infinite love. The Gospel is triumphant, and Satan is put to shame. Christ is God, and the human heart yields to him its steady, its pure affections. We live and rejoice with the good. We anticipate the joys of a

converted world. Our acquaintanceship with the generations to come is made a thing of present enjoyment. A heavy burden is taken from our hearts; for, the "lion of the tribe of Judah" has opened the mysterious book of the providence of God, and we feel how good it is, that God has revealed the future. There is no study that so certainly lifts us above the gloomy depressions incident to this brief life, as the study of the prophets, the humble, diligent, prayerful tracing on the inspired map, the progress of man, the tide of nations, and the success of the Gospel of Salvation.

All other forms of miracle have ceased; but in the prophecies we have a continually unfolding miracle, to cease only with the end of time. God has thus wisely ordained that the evidence of his existence and sovereignty over the affairs of men, should always be within reach of the devout and the prayerful. This evidence, in this form, was given even to our first parents, almost immediately after they sinned. Prophecy lifted up the veil of the future before their eyes, as an antidote to their fears. And ever since that hour, it has been like the bow in the cloud, to a suffering, desponding, afflicted Church. It is the pledge of her victory, the Divine signal that God is with her.

Shall the prophecies then be neglected? Shall

they be cast aside as unprofitable? Shall we say, as did Adam Clarke, with an air of profound wisdom, of the Book of Revelation: "I do not understand the Book," intending thereby to insinuate that it cannot be understood, and on this plea excuse ourselves from its study? No. Let us rather consider the object of prophecy, and the confidence God has placed in us, in committing it so unreservedly to our interpretation. This whole department of Sacred Scripture is for our benefit; and all we need, for its successful interpretation, is an honest purpose, and a prayerful heart, with the blessing of God. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Jas. i. 5.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS OF THE BIBLE.

The subject of this chapter does not seem, at the first glance, properly to belong to the particular design of this treatise; yet, for various reasons, it is very desirable that it should be noticed. In entering upon it, somewhat in detail, we shall be contributing directly to the science of a sound Biblical interpretation. Our attention will be occupied with matters of fact, rather than the general principles, by which the sense of Scripture is ascertained; but these principles shall not by any means be lost sight of. In the solution of many of the most plausible contradictions, alleged to exist in the Bible, sound first principles of exegesis, are our only hope. Where these fail us, the case is desperate.

That the writers of the Bible do, in appearance, conflict in some of their statements, both with themselves, and with each other, is not to be denied. Hence, the friends of revelation should hold them-

selves prepared to explain these apparent contradic tions, and defend the Bible, if it can be defended, from so grave a charge. When every other species of attack has failed, the enemies of the Bible have made this their last resort. They have said the Bible, by its contradictions, has disproved itself; and the daring and diligence of these men have been worthy of a better cause. Their success, however, has never repaid them for their pains; they have found it vastly more easy to bring charges than to prove them; and their gravest charges have very often come to nothing in their own hands. Some new discovery, or some new improvement in science, has defeated their strongest attempts to put the Bible in the wrong; and this has so frequently come to pass, that in these days, only one here and there is found courageous enough to make an attack, however feeble. The Bible, with all its weak points, is stronger than its foes. Its real dangers, in our day, seem to arise from its ill-advised friends, who make an indiscreet defence of its doctrines, supposing there is no way so sure to uphold its Divine character, as by proving its irreconcilable opposition to all human science.

Adopting, then, a very general classification of the alleged contradictions in the Bible, we arrange them into the four following classes:

I. Those which are said to occur in statements of facts and doctrines.

II. Those between prophecy, and its fulfillment.

III. Those against the principles of morality.

IV. Those at variance with the nature of things, or with the natural sciences, astronomy, and geology.

We propose to notice these alleged contradictions somewhat in detail, mainly for the purpose of showing how all such charges may be disposed of, and the consistency and truth of the Bible vindicated. We make no pretensions of traversing the whole field, nor of repelling every supposed instance of contradiction. Such an attempt might occupy many such volumes as this; and would be regarded as a work too elaborate to be read.

I. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS IN FACTS AND DOCTRINES.

Before proceeding, it may be proper to observe that errors in the text of Scripture are, of course, to be excepted in this discussion. Such errors there may be, in the Bible. It would be nothing short of a miracle if there were not. That there are such errors in the historical books, there can be no doubt; and that there are some in the doctrinal books is a point proved. They occurred probably in the process of transcription; from the

great similarity of many of the Hebrew letters; from the oversight of the copiers; and from the zeal of ardent friends. But this admission militates just nothing against the veracity of the Bible. It is all that we are willing to grant, after the most thorough and impartial investigation; and the whole amount of it is, that one writer says, there were so many men in a certain army, and so many slain in a certain battle, and another says something different; or some unimportant word repeating a truth already asserted has been added from the margin; but in all cases the original writer was right, and as the case now stands, no palpable contradiction can be proved. Call to mind the history of the Bible, and if you are a competent judge of the purity of its original text, you will not be greatly moved at a few trivial mistakes such as have been now described. There is no book in existence, so old, with so few variations in its text. It therefore defies the inspection of the world. Indeed, infidels turn away in haste from any attempt to prove it corrupt. This they have learned to do from experience.

The efforts of critics on the text of the Bible are thus correctly set forth by a modern writer:—

"As to the Old Testament, the indefatigable investigations and the four folios of Father Houbigant, the thirty years' labor of John Henry Michæ-

lis; above all, the great critical Bible, and the ten years' study of the famous Kennicott (upon his five hundred and eighty-one Hebrew MSS.), and finally, the collection of the six hundred and eighty MSS. of Prof. Rossi; as to the New Testament, the not less gigantic investigations of Mill, Bengel, Wetstein, and Griesbach (into the three hundred and thirty-five MSS. of the Gospels alone), the later researches of Nolan, Matthei, Lawrence, and Hug; above all, those of Scholz (with his six hundred and seventy-four MSS. of the Gospels, his two hundred MSS. of the Acts, his two hundred and fifty-six MSS. of Paul's Epistles, his ninety-three MSS. of the Apocalypse, without counting his fifty-three Lectionaria); all these prodigious labors have established, in a manner so convincing, the astonishing preservation of the text, although copied so many thousand times (in Hebrew, during thirty-three centuries, and in Greek during eighteen centuries), that the hopes of the enemies of religion from this quarter have been overthrown; and that, as Michælis remarks, 'they have thenceforward ceased to hope anything from these critical researches, at first earnestly recommended by them, because from them they expected discoveries which no one has made.'"

To proceed then with the subject of this chapter: it is alleged that Gen. xxii. 1, "God did tempt

Abraham," contradicts Jas. i. 13, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." We admit that, as far as words go, the contradiction is very striking. But a contradiction in words is not of necessity a contradiction in sense. The former is harmless; the latter is not proved. The circumstances in which the two statements were made, show very clearly that in sense they do not differ. Moses says—"God tempted Abraham;" and the history shows what he means. He means that Abraham's faith was put to the test; but to constitute a temptation, in the bad sense of the word, reference must be had to the motive by which it is dictated. God did not *design* to lead the patriarch into sin; Moses did not design to say that he did. James is treating of the origin of sin, and he traces it very correctly to the "lust" or will of the sinner himself. In the course of his argument, he says God is not to be charged with the origin of sin, "for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" *i. e.*, he does not intentionally set motives before men, for the purpose of leading them into sin. "But every man is tempted," says James, "when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Thus the meaning of Moses is actually in harmony with that of James; God proved Abraham's faith, and every man is *tempted* when he is

drawn away of his own lust and enticed." The contradiction is only in sound, and arises from the use of the word "tempt" by both writers, in a slightly modified sense, easily discovered from the circumstances of the case.

Of the same nature is a supposed contradiction between 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, "The Lord moved David to number Israel and Judah," and 1 Chron. xxi. 1, "Satan stood up and provoked David to number Israel." In reply we remark, this is only one of a great many instances in which various causes are said to meet in the production of the same events. Thus God is said to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart; the priests are said to have bought the potter's field with the thirty pieces of silver, and Judas is said to have bought the field: Solomon is said to have built the Temple, and yet he only hired Hiram to build: God is said to have delivered Lot from Sodom, and yet Lot escaped in the use of his own feet: Paul is said to have begotten, or converted the Corinthians, and yet the Spirit of God alone converts the soul. Now the simple and satisfactory explanation of all these seeming contradictions is—the writers at the moment had not their thoughts directed to the same causes, as immediately preceding, or giving birth to the events narrated.

Every effect, or event, has many antecedent causes, either more or less remote; and sometimes one is specified, and sometimes another. But, it is in vain to say there is any contradiction in such cases. Let those who bring the charge, define what a contradiction is, and then let them establish an instance, if they can, in which any such thing occurs, in all the inspired Volume.

The words of our Saviour, Jno. v. 37, "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape," are regarded as opposed to Jno. xiv. 9, and Deut. iv. 12, "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father;" "Ye heard the voice of the words." But as before, all depends on the *meaning* of the separate texts; and that is to be ascertained by the context, the object of the writer, and the nature of the subject on which he is speaking. In the first, the context shows that our Lord charges the people with resisting the manifestation of the will of God. He does this in peculiar language; but his hearers no doubt perfectly understood him. He says they had neither seen nor heard God. This was literally true; it was not in a literal sense, however, that he wished to be understood. He was charging them with disobedience; and it is this fact he intends to bring home to them, when he says, "Ye have neither heard His voice, nor seen His shape." They had been a diso-

bedient, blind people, under all dispensations, they had disregarded the means which God had taken to sanctify and save them. But when it is said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen my Father," the meaning is not in the words; it turns, as before, on the fact of their disobedience. He that obeys me, obeys my Father, is the sentiment enforced. There is, therefore, no contradiction here.

A similar instance is said to occur in Jno. v. 31, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true," compared with Jno. viii. 14, "Though I bear witness of myself, yet my witness is true." The Jews themselves, who heard our Lord on both occasions, charged Him with inconsistency. But unjustly. In the first He means to say, that if He alone bore testimony to His Messiahship, then His claims must needs be false; for whoever might be the real Messiah, would certainly have other witnesses of the fact beside himself. In the second passage, He designs to say, though He did alone bear witness of His claims, yet they were true. There is no contradiction in these statements. If a man could bring no evidence but his own word for his honesty, that alone would not prove it; yet a man might be strictly honest, though he himself should affirm it. This is all that our Lord meant to say. The language of our Lord, Mat. v. 34, is said to be at variance with Heb. vi. 16.

In the latter passage, Paul says: "An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife," as though he gave his sanction to oaths. Granting that he does sanction oaths, there is no contradiction between him and our Lord; for the latter does not refer to anything but profane swearing, or taking the name of God in vain. His language is, "Swear not at all." But this does not forbid the appeal to God in a court of justice.

Once more: 1 Jno. ii. 20, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things," is supposed to contradict Mat. xxiv. 36, in which it is affirmed, that no man knows the day of judgment. But when John says, "Ye know all things," his meaning is to be gathered from the connection. He means simply to say that they were fully acquainted with the character of Christ and the doctrines of the Gospel. He did not surely mean to assert that they were Omniscient.

Finally, it has often been alleged that the different accounts of the resurrection of Christ are contradictory. But, in reply, we aver in one sentence, that all such pretences are wholly without foundation. Our twelfth preliminary axiom forestalls all such allegations. Omission is not misstatement; and additional testimony is not of necessity conflicting testimony.

The above instances may serve as a specimen of alleged contradictions under our first head. That of Paul and James has been reconciled under our 8th general rule.

II. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN PROPHECIES AND THEIR FULFILLMENT.

Of these there are but few brought forward. For our enemies here have found rather a barren field. But they must needs quote Jonah iii. 4, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." But the condition of this threatening was, that if the city repented within the forty days, it should not be destroyed. Nineveh did repent; it was spared, and the prophecy was fulfilled. It would also have been fulfilled, if the people had remained impenitent, and the city had been destroyed.

Another instance is said to be in respect to our Lord's remaining in the grave. The fact is admitted that in the prophecy three days and three nights are specified; and that our Lord was in the grave only one whole day, and parts of two. He was laid in the sepulchre towards evening of the first, He remained there all the second; and arose early on the morning of the third. In the common usage of the country, however, this was understood to be three

days. Hence the prophecy was fulfilled in the estimation of the generation to whom it was given.

Jer. xxxiii. 20, is supposed to be an example. It reads: "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne." What has become of this prophecy? asks our objector. Where is the king on the throne these 1800 years? We reply, Jesus, of the seed of David according to the flesh, is the King of Israel, and he is on the throne for ever, and shall reign for ever and ever.

If, by way of a rejoinder, it be said that Jeremiah did not intend to foretell the kingship of Christ, we might grant the fact; and yet our position would remain immovable. For it does not belong essentially to the nature of a prophecy, that the prophet himself fully understood all that his words imply. Daniel states expressly that he understood not the vision of the ram and the goat; and a special messenger was sent to cause him to understand the things which were about to befall his people in the latter days. In the last vision, he says: "I heard, but I understood not." It is enough that the pro-

phecy is intelligible as a Divine prediction, and be fully realized and made complete in the events of history. Such is the fact with the prophecy above mentioned. To its every letter it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As we have already said, this has proved rather a barren field for objectors. Every successive charge has led to a renewed investigation, and that to a new victory on the part of the Bible. The exact fulfillment of the prophecies has been very much like the miracles of Moses in Egypt. Those seeking to disprove the Divine mission of the Bible, have very frequently felt constrained to cry out: "this is the finger of God?" The prophecy once pronounced, has remained on the imperishable record, till in due time, the event has proclaimed the manifest interposition of God. Whether for a day, or a month, or a year, or a thousand years, it has calmly waited its issue. No accident has prevented the result; no conspiracy of men, nor malice of devils, has sufficed to defeat it. At the set time, it has been fulfilled with an evident certainty, which belongs only to the Divine purposes. Prophecy, as an argument in behalf of the Bible, may be compared to one of the great Pyramids. It cannot be removed by the efforts of an ant. Its mighty structure will not come down, at the bidding of him, who merely dis-

lodges, as he thinks, a brick here and there from the outer wall. It shall stand till the last trumpet shake the world, and call the universe to judgment.

III. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY.

Of this class, the enemies of the Bible, in their own estimation, have discovered a very great number; the command to sacrifice Isaac; the command given to borrow from the Egyptians; the extirpation of the Canaanites; the vow of Jephthah; the treatment of the Ammonites by David, and David's wicked conduct in the case of Uriah, and many others.

The command to offer Isaac, was given merely as a test of character, and as such, involved no contradiction to the principles of morality. God as Creator, and Proprietor of all, was competent to give such a command, for such a purpose, as truly as He is competent to send an earthquake, or a famine, or a pestilence, to take away human life, without injustice to men. Of the same nature was the command to exterminate the Canaanites; and therefore, the same general reply is given. It were easy, indeed, to show that, instead of conflicting with the principles of good morals, it was a purely benevolent measure.

It was a command to destroy a horde of robbers, a hopelessly depraved and wicked people; and the sword of Israel was as truly a friend to mankind, in that tragedy, as the sword of the magistrate, when unsheathed to defend society against social evil, or the arm of the invader.

The Jews were instructed by Moses to ask raiment and jewels from the Egyptians, which they never returned. The Egyptians lent to the Jews what they asked. But equity decides that all they thus received was in effect but a poor compensation for the long years of bondage unrequited, spent under their oppressors.

The case of Jephthah's daughter will not give the objector any great advantage. It cannot be proved that he sacrificed his daughter; and if it could be so proved, there is no evidence that the Bible approves of any such sacrifices.

Exod. xx. 6, is quoted as one instance in which there is a palpable contradiction of some other Scriptures, and of the principles of justice. The passages contradicted are, Jer. xxxi. 30, and Ezek. xviii. 20. The words in Exodus are: "for I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me." This visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is declared

unjust, and contrary to other Scriptures, which assert that the son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father. But the whole objection arises in a mistake. The visitation is upon those who *hate* God, and not on the innocent, consequently, instead of contradicting the above Scriptures, it is in fact, only another assertion of the principle which they contain, viz.: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," or every soul shall bear his own iniquity.

The treatment of the Ammonites by David, mentioned in 1 Chron. xx. 3, be it noted, is not in any sense justified in the narrative. If he were therefore really guilty of inhumanity, his fault is not to be charged on the Bible. But it is a matter of doubt, whether, in this instance, our English translation has faithfully rendered the original. The Hebrew would justify the statement that the captives were put simply to the sawing of timber, and the drudgery of the brick-kilns, and the labors of the field. Cruelty was not a trait of David's character.

As respects the conduct of David towards Uriah, it is recorded, even in the public annals of his life, accompanied with the reproof of a special messenger, and with the judgment of God threatened upon his household. It is not therefore approved, but pointedly condemned, and consequently, no objection on this score, can lie against the Bible.

Many of the Psalms of David have been denounced as totally inconsistent with benevolence. But some of these very denunciations violate the law of morals they would enforce on the Psalmist. If the general benevolence of David's heart be called in question, we have a word to say in its defence. Look at his conduct towards Saul for forty years; Saul being, during all these forty years, his mortal enemy. Can the world produce another such instance of magnanimity towards an enemy? Saul was several times in David's power; David spared him, and in all these forty years, uttered not a syllable of revenge towards the man, who thirsted for his life. Is not this proof of a benevolent heart? Look at his sentiments recorded in his Psalms, without the faintest tinge of anything of the nature of misanthropy. In the particular Psalms referred to, there is not a syllable but what is implied or expressed in the wishes and prayers of every good man, that the laws of God, and of the State, may be maintained, and the wicked punished. Is there any offence done against morality, in wishing that the thief, the adulterer, the murderer, and the man-stealer, may be brought to condign punishment? Is it a violation of the law of benevolence to express such wishes in Sacred song? What then shall be said of many of the most popular poems on liberty, and patriotism? Must

these also be condemned? But David's Psalms are of the same character, in principle, with the best of these patriotic compositions; having this additional circumstance in their favor, that they are dictated by Divine benevolence, and without the least mixture of ill-will, or inhumanity towards any living being. This is true of the judge, who, for the public good, condemns the criminal to death. How much more, is it true of the man of God, who speaks as he is moved by the Spirit, when he prays that the wicked may not escape the sentence of the law?

It has been objected that both true and false prophets have been sent forth, under the Divine sanction; and that miracles have been recorded, as wrought both by the friends and the enemies of the Bible. In respect to the latter charge, we reply, while the record, for instance, of miracles wrought by the magicians of Egypt is admitted, we do not admit the fact that miracles were wrought by these astrologers. The artlessness of the record might lead us to suppose that miracles were wrought, but nothing more is intended by it, than to convey the fact that the magicians attempted to work miracles; and in some way prevailed for a time on Pharaoh to believe that they did. The character of God and the nature of the case, require us to believe that none but true miracles were wrought. This is,

nevertheless, certain, there was a point beyond which the jugglery of the magicians did not succeed; but if they failed in one case they must have failed in all. Did Moses, or any other heaven-sent ambassador fail in any instance? Never.

In respect to false prophets, reference is made to 1 Kings, xxii. 23, "Now, therefore, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets." But this is just the old and often-answered objection, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God is said to do just what the false prophets do; in what sense this is said, it is quite easy for us to understand. The people and the false prophets perverted the means which God was employing for their sanctification; for this He gave them up to the desires of their own hearts, just as He did the king of Egypt. In this sense He gave them a lying spirit. In a like sense He "creates all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." That is, all things are created for the glory of God, and they will of course subserve that purpose; yea, even the wicked themselves will subserve that purpose. But this is not to say that God is the author of evil; or, that He takes any pleasure in sin; or, prefers the aid of false prophets and wicked men, in the government of the world.

Another objection has been that various passages

speak of God as repenting, while others represent Him as of one mind and incapable of repentance. Thus, Gen. vi. 6, "It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth." And Num. xxiii. 19, "God is not man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent."

This difficulty, if difficulty it be, involves the question, whether God, as an uncreated and eternal being, has feelings and emotions such as men have? It is enough for our purpose that the language of the Bible represents Him as possessed of like emotions with men, such as grief, joy, disappointment, compassion, and repentance, or change of mind. In other words, He is not absolutely emotionless and without feelings; yet, at the same time, when feelings and emotions are ascribed to Him, it must be in harmony with His infinite and glorious perfections. The passage in Genesis describes a fact in the Divine mind; God was grieved with the wickedness of men. Who can deny it? What, then, is the meaning of the passage in Numbers xxiii. 19? We reply, it also asserts a fact respecting the Divine nature, viz. —its immutability. With Jehovah there is of a truth no variableness, nor shadow of turning, such as is common to man. And yet grief in the Divine mind, when sin occurs, is a fact not to be denied. But this feeling of grief and His immutability are

entirely compatible. He is angry with the wicked every day; and He is of one mind, and repenteth not. His purposes are the same from eternity to eternity. This results from the nature of God, and hence the language is entirely consistent and truthful. It describes facts and states in the Divine mind, as they are, in a manner perfectly intelligible; and all just objection is thus removed.

It yet remains that we consider the alleged contradictions of the Bible to natural science; but this we defer to the next chapter.

IV. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS OF THE NATURE OF THINGS, OR OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES, IN THE BIBLE.

It has been the rash affirmation of infidels, that the Bible and modern science are totally irreconcilable. Their argument has been very brief, and, in their view, very effective: "natural science, so-called, is all true; the Bible contradicts natural science; therefore, the Bible is not true, and not true, it is not from God."

But one thing is certain; to go no further back than the last twenty-five years, those who have advanced this syllogism have not increased, but marvellously diminished, in number; so that at the present moment, the noblest names of science pub-

licly avow their belief, that not one scientific error of any kind is found in all the Bible. Yea, the majority of scientific men are committed to this position; and the minority may dispose of this fact as they can. Will they dispose of it by denying the competency of their associates in science?

The supposed contradictions are said to refer chiefly to the natural science — astronomy and geology. Alas! that any friend of the Bible should wish to have these contradictions proven. Nothing is more certain than the fact, that the Word of God is, and ever must be, in perfect harmony with all true natural science. An inspired book, and that the Bible is such, is a point proved, cannot contradict existing facts in the natural world. Was there any mystery of science too deep for the Divine Spirit, or, could there be any motive for His failing to direct the sacred penmen infallibly, in things which lay infinitely more clear in his mind, than they ever did, or can lie, in the minds of all the scientific and mortal men that ever lived, or that ever will live upon earth?

ASTRONOMY.

As respects astronomy, it has been objected that the writers of the Bible did not entertain the modern

views of this science; that they regarded the heavens as moving round the earth, and the earth as a vast extended plain. We admit such were their sentiments. They were wholly ignorant of modern astronomy. But the question is not as to their ignorance or their knowledge. It is, do they in their writings contradict any of the facts of this science? And we reply, it has never been proved that they do. They wrote according to the knowledge they had; they knew just what they saw of natural phenomena; and they never pretended to know more than they actually did know. Yet there is not in all their writing a solitary sentence at variance with the facts of modern astronomy. Ps. civ. 5 is quoted, as one passage in which they absolutely contradict this science: "God hath laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever." Now it is admitted that the foolish priests, who threatened Galileo, the astronomer, with death for his discoveries, did think this text contrary to modern astronomy. But when we correctly interpret the passage, we find it simply a description of a fact, viz., the felt stability of the world. David expresses what he feels; just as any poet of our day might have done, without being suspected for a moment of teaching things opposed to the true science of the heavens. To say, popularly, that the earth is steadfast and immovable, that the

sun rises and sets, that the stars go down in the west, is not to oppose science. It is to describe events as they are seen by the eye; and this is all the contradiction the Bible can be charged with. Astronomers themselves speak of "fixed stars;" when they profess to know that they are not fixed, but moving, like all the other starry bodies of the heavens.

There is no other passage in the Bible, save that above referred to, and its equivalents, that was ever supposed to be at variance with astronomy; or if there be more, we know them not. For lack of material in this department, an argument against the Bible has been framed from astronomy, as though these two must if possible be set in array against each other. The argument is put in this form: seeing there is such an immensity of worlds, and this world is positively so small, compared with many others, and as nothing compared with the great whole, the Bible cannot be divine, because this world must be beneath the notice of God, it is so amazingly small.

Let it be remembered, in this instance, that science so called is the aggressor, and is responsible for the aggression. The Bible itself teaches the exceeding littleness of this world and of all its inhabitants; but it also teaches that God created

them all; that He cares for them with fatherly tenderness; yea, that the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, suffered death as a sacrifice for sin, so that the penitent might be saved. Now if science contradicts all this, let it produce its authority or be silent. Reason certainly teaches that God created the world, and men of science generally confess as much; but if He created it, He can care for it. Its amazing littleness can be no hindrance in His way. It is small—very small, as the dust of His chariot wheels; yet this does not disprove His care and condescension towards it; and it does not prove that He cannot give a revelation of His will to its inhabitants.

The science that would reject the Bible on such grounds, seems to proceed on the principle that mind is of no peculiar importance, hardly worth the Divine recognition; and that matter is all important, if there be only enough of it. Is this science? Is not one mind, one soul, though it cannot be weighed or measured, of more value than a thousand such material globes as this? This superior worth or dignity of the soul is the basis of all the dignity, as well as the certainty, which belongs to science. What were science without the soul? They imply each other; and whatever of glory, or of shame, falls to the one, falls also to the other. So

that of all unseemly acts of suicide, the most unseemly is that of a man of science seeking to cut off the soul from the voice and consolations of its Creator and friend, as expressed in the Scriptures. All such acts are without excuse. But true science never attempts any such acts. What nobler name in astronomy can be named, than Isaac Newton; and yet his great genius consecrated itself to an abiding faith in the Scriptures as divine; so that having scaled the heavens and pointed out the true philosophy of the stars, thenceforth he gave himself to the exposition of the Word of God, drinking out of its fountains all the way to the end of his life, and leaving behind him the testimony that the beginning of all science was the fear of God and faith in His inspired Word. Out of the depths of the starry heavens, he brought forth clearer evidence of the being and attributes of Jehovah, believing with the Psalmist, that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." A wise astronomer will be the last man to call in question these sentiments; the objections of an undevout astronomer are not worthy of any very great regard.

But very little interest does this alleged contradiction between the Bible and astronomy now excite. The faith of Christendom is calmly resting in the

fact, that this science and the Word of God are at one.

GEOLOGY.

It is geology, which, at this moment, is only emerging into something like order, that many suppose to be so irreconcilable with revelation. Some friends of the Bible vainly labor to establish the fact, unconscious of the mischief they are producing.

Let us first of all ascertain the well substantiated facts of geology; that we may compare therewith the simple historical statements of the Bible. If there is any palpable contradiction between the two, it will certainly appear.

In grouping together, at one view, the principal facts in geology, we avail ourselves of the labors of one, whose name is a sufficient guarantee of correctness and candor; Edward Hitchcock, D.D. In his original and deeply-interesting work—"The Religion of Geology"—he states the cardinal facts of this science, briefly as follows:

I. The rocks forming the crust of our globe appear to have been the result of second causes.

II. The same general laws seem always to have prevailed on our globe, and to have controlled its changes.

III. The changes which the earth has undergone, appear to have been the result of the same agencies, heat and water.

IV. The present continents have for a long period formed the bottom of the ocean.

V. The internal parts of the earth are in fusion, and possess a very high degree of heat.

VI. The rocks which contain animals and plants, are not less than six or seven miles in thickness, and are composed of many layers of different kinds; and must have occupied in their formation an immense period of time.

VII. The remains of animals and plants are not found in confusion, but for the most part in very regular order, as though they had lived and died where they are found.

VIII. About five different distinct races of these animals and plants seem to have existed and passed away before the creation of the races which now occupy the earth.

IX. In the earliest times in which animals and plants lived, the climate over the whole globe seems to have been warm, warmer than it is now between the tropics.

X. There is good reason to suppose that the earth underwent many changes before the existence of animals and plants.

XI. The present condition of the earth seems of recent origin.

XII. Among the 30,000 species of animals and plants found in the rocks, very few living species have been observed; and these few, in the most recent rocks. In the secondary rocks, not a single species now existing has been discovered.

XIII. The surface of the earth has undergone an enormous amount of erosion by the action of the ocean, rivers, and the atmosphere.

XIV. Northern regions as well as Southern have been swept over and abrased by ice and water; the force in general being towards the equator.

XV. Since this last period, the ocean has been some thousands of feet above its present level in many countries.

XVI. Some parts of the world are now being changed, some places are sinking, and others rising.

XVII. Every change of importance seems to have been an improvement, fitting it for beings of a higher organization.

Finally, the present races of animals and plants are disposed in groups in districts, beyond whose limits they usually droop and die.

Here then we have a full and intelligible exposition of the main facts in the science of geology, the result of long study and enlightened observation.

No doubts can be raised as to its general correctness. We accept it, as one of the most reliable statements of the science, and are not unwilling to confront with it the records of inspiration. If such be the history of the framework of the earth, written in the process of ages, on the surface of the earth, sure are we that the history given in the Bible, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, will not in any case contradict it. He, by whom the Bible was written, directed and completed every change through which the globe has passed from the first hour of its existence; and, therefore, he was competent to secure a record in every respect true to the facts in the case.

The general conclusions, then, to which the above facts conduct us, are, that long before man existed, and long before the animals now found on our globe were created, the solid framework of our planet was in existence; and after a long succession of periods and ages, the various classes of living creatures, whose remains have been discovered, were created and occupied the earth in their turn; till by the depression of the seas and other causes, they perished and were imbedded in the places where we now find them. Thus the earth was prepared for man; and he, and the other animals and plants now existing, were created, and all things arranged in their

present order. This is geology, and we believe it all.

But what is the Bible's account of creation, and how does it differ from that of geology?

The first announcement of Scripture is, "In the beginning, God created the heavens, and the earth." This certifies to the fact of creation. The universe is not an accident, nor a growth, nor a development of any kind—in its elements, it is a creation, called into being by the voice of the Almighty. Against this, geology has nothing to say, but to assent. The second general statement of Scripture is, that after the event of creation, the earth was "without form and void," by which we understand it was not in the condition of order and beauty, in which we now find it. Here also, geology is agreed. According to its teachings, there was a vast period, or succession of periods, in which desolation reigned over the globe; and this we regard as a most singular confirmation of Scripture.

The third step in the inspired record, is the breaking up of this chaos, or desolation, through the agency of the Spirit. How long it was before this was accomplished, or by what physical processes, is not in the Bible affirmed. But geology admits the fact of this breaking up, and places no precise limits

to the times in which it was achieved. Thus far, therefore, the two authorities are fully agreed.

In due time, however, the present order of things began in our world; at a date, in round numbers, from the present time, about six thousand of our years. And such, also, is the definitive decision of geology; and here again is a remarkable confirmation of the Scriptures. As we interpret the record, during the first day of the present world, or order of the world, the dense atmosphere of vapor that surrounded the globe, became rarified, and the face of the sky partially cleared; the light of the sun could have been perceived by the human eye. On the second day, the waters were gathered chiefly into their present positions; and the dry land appeared, as we now find it; and the seeds and plants peculiar to it were created; all this was on the third day. On the fourth day, the sky was wholly clear, revealing the sun and stars, as we now see them, appointed from the first, to be for lights upon earth. Next came the various fishes, and fowls, and creeping things, now existing. On the sixth day, came man, the crowning work of Creation, made in the image of God, to have dominion over all the earth, and to have fellowship with his heavenly Father. All this work of ordering, and peopling our world, as it is

now, according to the Bible, was accomplished in the space of six days. So we interpret the first chapter of Genesis, whose language faithfully describes the events of the period, as these events would have seemed to occur to a human spectator. Such a description, the inspired writer meant to give, we firmly believe; and such is the impression left on the unbiased reader of all ages, seeking to know the meaning of the Word of God. If was designed for all generations to come; and a truthful history it is. God would not mock the world with a myth, or a fable, at the very outset of His Inspired Volume. They, who labor in this nineteenth century, for the first time, to show that Moses meant by the six days a long series of periods, of thousands of years, and that the seventh day is not an ordinary day, but the present seven thousand years since the ceasing of creation, have undertaken an enterprise that will prove too much for them. Moses, in the fourth commandment, affirms the seventh day to be a day of the ordinary length, like all the six; and this he affirms of the first Sabbath. This affirmation is final, both as to the theory we have adopted, and the errors of that theory of which we now speak. Certainly every principle of correct interpretation obliges us to receive the account in Genesis as the account of events occurring during seven days.

And geology has no data to contravert the fact. It cannot prove that the present order of things could not have been arranged within that period. It says the solid crust of the earth must have been in existence for a very long period before man was created. So let it be; the Bible contains not one word to the contrary. It says there must have been many distinct races of animals and plants in existence, previous to those we now behold. So let it be; the Bible contains not one word to the contrary. It says these various races must have been destroyed by the breaking up of the earth's crust, by depressions of the seas, and earthquakes, and similiar causes. So let it be; the Bible saith not one word to the contrary, and silence is not contradiction. Any former state of things on this globe may have consumed thousands of years in completing itself; there is certainly nothing to hinder us from believing this, so far as the Bible is concerned. But what is any fact of that sort, to the question in hand? What force is there in it, to impeach the veracity of the Bible, as it stands? None, whatever. The Bible affirms that all things in heaven and earth were not developed, but created; that they are not a growth, nor an accident in any sense; and that after their creation, chaos reigned; but how long it reigned is not said, because it is really of no practical impor-

tance for any man to know. In due time, however, chaos and all its changes gave place to the system and order we now behold; and at this point, Moses begins his history. It was the right point for all practical purposes. We must be careful to note that Moses does not affirm that all things were created expressly in the period of six days, just six thousand years ago. It was in the beginning, that all things in their elements were created; but the creation of man, and the earth's present inhabitants, both according to the Bible and geology, took place about that period. In this, therefore, both revelation and science are agreed. But let the age of the crust of the world be what it may, and suppose as many races of plants and animals differing from those now existing, as you please, to live and die, before man was created, geology, and the Bible also, teaches that God created and directed all. And if the Bible begins not with the history of the fishes, and serpents, and monsters of the land and sea, such as geology reveals in the various deposits, what then! It begins with the history of the world that now is; it narrates that history, as it actually occurred, and there is not one fact in all the annals and discoveries of geology to contradict it. Had the Bible denied the existence of the globe previous to the six days; had any other place been assigned to existing ani-

mals than that they actually occupy; or, had the existence of these immense creatures, whose remains are found in the rocks, and in the alluvial deposits, been positively denied, there had been good reason to say that the Bible contradicts geology. In any of these cases it had affirmed that which is demonstrably false. But as the fact is, Scripture is in perfect harmony with all the discoveries of geology. If we have conjectured the opposite, it is our own mistake; and we ought to correct it, just as we have done in respect to astronomy.

Modern discoveries have changed the views of all Christendom respecting the Bible and the science of the heavens. Hear what Luther said, in his "Table-Talk," on this subject:—"I am informed that a new astrologer is risen, who presumes to prove that the earth moveth and goeth about, not the firmament, the sun, moon, and stars; like as when one, who sits in a coach, or a ship, and is moved, thinks he sitteth still and rests, but the earth and trees go, run, and move themselves. Therefore, so it is, when we give ourselves up to our own foolish fancies. This fool will turn the whole art of astronomy up side down, but Scripture showeth and teacheth him another lesson, when Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still, and not the earth." And later theologians have held the same sentiments; but

who does not smile at such sentiments now? The whole art of astronomy, as the ancients understood it, is indeed turned up-side down, and that for ever! But has the Bible been turned up-side down? It has been most remarkably confirmed. And we confidently look for the same result in respect to the science of geology.

The change has already begun. For ten, who a few years ago, looked on that science with distrust, there is not now found one. The most distinguished men of science regard the Bible, rightly interpreted, as, in every respect, at agreement with geology. Those even who maintain the idea, that Moses means long periods of ages, by the words "day and night," in Genesis, profess to find the Bible on their side, confirming the doctrine of their favorite science. It is then a settled point, that there is no contradiction between the Scriptures and geology. But on this we build a conclusion. Neither Moses nor any of the sacred writers knew what we now know of astronomy and geology. The fact may seem to be a confession of their ignorance. Be it so. It redounds very much to the honor of the Bible. For how came it to pass, that neither Moses, nor any other inspired penman, totally ignorant though they were of these sciences, did *not* write one sentence at variance with them? There is nothing so rash as igno-

rance, nothing so ready and eager to rush into error, desperate in its very blindness. Why then was not their ignorance a snare to them? Why were they preserved from the palpable blunders of every other class of writers pretending to inspiration? The answer is as certain and infallible as demonstration can make it—they wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore the Bible is in harmony both with astronomy and geology; and so far, the evidence is incontrovertible that its origin is Divine.

This much may therefore suffice to show, in what manner the supposed contradictions of the Bible are to be disposed of. If it be an imperfect view, it is at least a bird's-eye view of the subject, and the reader must improve upon it for himself.

These four things we note in conclusion:

1. Fewer objections are urged against the Bible, in proportion as a true knowledge of the world and its history advances. It has been said, ignorance is the mother of devotion; say rather, the mother of unfounded objections to the Word of God. Both ignorance and opposition to the Sacred Oracles, are passing rapidly away; and none will mourn their departure. The Bible was made for the highest state of knowledge to which it is possible for man to reach; and every increase of knowledge only

assists in hastening the glorious victory which awaits the Bible in the future. That future will be as full of joy and peace, as the past has been full of doubt and conflict.

2. The present state of science confirms the veracity of the Bible, in all its statements, both as touching the origin of our world, and the various changes through which it has passed. No thanks to the enemies of the Bible for this. It is a result achieved, despite the wishes even of some of the friends of the Bible; but it is all too well established ever to be reversed. Science and inspiration cannot differ.

3. All objections against the Bible, from natural science, are *primâ facie* without foundation. Because the Bible, written under the superintendence of the Spirit of God, cannot err in that department of knowledge, confessedly the inferior and the least necessary for man to possess. Science and revelation contradicting each other! rather let him who harbors any such thought, be told, he knows not what he affirms.

4. The principles of religion, having their origin in the nature of God, and in the relations which man sustains to God, are absolutely independent of all facts connected with the physical condition and history of this world, and of the universe. With

the principles of religion the Bible has chiefly to do. Hence astronomy and geology, and all natural science whatever, can have no antagonistic attitude towards the Bible. These sciences can never refute, nor overthrow, one of the Bible's doctrines; for though the earth and the material universe were burned up, the principles and doctrines of the Bible would remain just what they are, in themselves, eternally holy, just, good, and true, indestructible as the attributes of God, by the inspiration of whose Spirit they have been recorded on the imperishable pages of the Bible.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE ORIGIN OF DIFFICULTIES IN INTERPRETATION.

It will directly subserve the main design of this treatise, to point out here, very briefly, some of the chief sources whence difficulties most generally arise in respect to the meaning of the Bible. The discovery of the origin of a difficulty, is often the best clue to the removal of it; and that there are difficulties in the interpretation of the Bible, none will deny, although many can discover these difficulties, who have not patience to seek for them a satisfactory explanation. That they can be solved, and the whole volume commended to the head and heart of every honest man, is as certain, as that the volume itself has been sent forth into the world under the inspiration of the Almighty. At least, more can be achieved in this direction than is generally believed.

The sources of some of the chief difficulties in interpretation are the following:

I. The character of the Book. It is a revelation of mysteries, and of many doctrines in themselves beyond the power of the human mind to discover. In such a case, even where the language is as transparent as the light, there is the transcendent nature of the subject to perplex the mind. The only remedy for difficulties from this source, is a child-like confidence in the veracity of God, who cannot lie.

II. The mode of its publication. It was given at intervals; by men of very different degrees of knowledge, of distinct peculiarities, writing for the men immediately around them, and in some measure acquainted with the events and sentiments recorded. Hence we approach it at a disadvantage. The country of its origin is far distant; its customs very diverse from our own; the language dissimilar; and the genius of its institutions very different from anything with which we are acquainted. Difficulties arising from these sources must not be pressed beyond reason; they are such as do not in any sense affect the foundations of religion.

III. The antiquity of the Bible is one source of its obscurities. It is the oldest book in existence. Its earliest histories run back to the creation; and traverse a period which no other writings have described; while its latest records are two thousand

years old. What changes have overtaken the world, since that day! What revolution in language, in nations, in science! How the mind of man has enlarged the sphere of its knowledge since the Sacred Record was closed. But let not the Bible be prejudged on that account. Let candor and patience have their perfect work.

IV. Its unscientific method of narration gives rise to many perplexities! It is not the work of minds trained in the schools. It has no art but that of simplicity, thrown off its guard. With no guile in their hearts, the writers often seem not to know that guile exists. They are so anxious to deliver their message, that they seldom regard unbelief, or objection as at all possible. And yet this simplicity is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. John, one of the most artless and transparent of all the writers, is often most in need of a wise and wary interpreter. But here candor should meet with candor; and soon the simplicity of the sacred writers will protect them from the charge of all evil intentions.

V. The controversial character of some of the books has created difficulties. This is true in reference to many passages in Job, and the Epistles of Paul. The language of controversy is guarded; aimed at some one point; and easily perverted when taken out of its connection. It is from this source

that the differences between Paul and James have arisen. The removal of all such difficulties is best achieved by mastering the point of controversy and then interpreting the language accordingly.

VI. False interpretations have given rise to difficulties which otherwise never could have arisen. Passages have first been misinterpreted; then these misinterpretations have been set in array against other portions of the Bible, as though they were wholly irreconcilable, and the Scriptures have been made inconsistent with themselves. The remedy in such a case is to interpret right, then the Bible will need no self-reconciliation.

VII. The progressive nature of Revelation has been one great source of perplexity. This involved a change of dispensation from the simple patriarchate, to the mysterious economy of sacrifices, and the more glorious dispensation of the Gospel; and these changes wrought others in the use of terms, and introduced new ideas under old terms, which still haunt the mind in their old significations, creating confusion in our thoughts as a matter of course. But we must endeavor to keep up with the light of revelation, and allow our minds to expand as its light expands, following the Divine manifestation as it goes forward, without fear or doubting.

VIII. Imperfections in our translations have given

rise to many things hard to be explained. The English translation now in use, is probably the best ever made; yet there are imperfections in it, where the true sense of the original has not been conveyed, or conveyed only in part. The following are examples: Matt. vi. 25, "Take no thought for your life." Phil. iv. 6, "Be careful for nothing." The original is—"Be not over anxious." Col. i. 15, "The first born of every creature." It should have been "Pre-eminent over every creature." Acts ii. 27, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell." The Greek is: "In the state of the dead." 1 Sam. ii. 25, "Because the Lord would slay them." The Hebrew is: "Therefore the Lord would slay them." Mark ix. 24, "I believe, help thou my unbelief." The original for "help" is an idiom very difficult to render into English. Its meaning is: "Come to my help that my unbelief may be changed into faith."

IX. Modes of speech have been the occasion of many perplexities; some of these modes are common to Hebrew, some to Greek, and others to all languages.

(1.) Thus a part is used for the whole, and the whole for a part. Gal. v. 14, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word." Matt. iv. 8, "Showeth him all the kingdoms of the world." James v. 17,

"It rained not on the earth." In both instances Palestine alone is meant.

(2.) The thing, or person to which another is compared is spoken of as the thing, or person himself. Jas. iii. 6, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity." Matt. xxvi. 26, "Take, eat, this is my body." Jas. iv. 14, "What is your life? it is a vapor." Matt. xvii. 12, "I say unto you Elias is come."

(3.) The instrument, or means, or mere occasion of an event is spoken of as though it were the absolute and efficient cause of that event. Jas. v. 20, "Let him know, that he that converteth a sinner, shall save a soul from death." 1 Pet. i. 22, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth." "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole." Luke viii. 48.

(4.) An incidental result is often spoken of as though it were the decreed result preordained by the will of God. Matt. x. 34, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Jno. xvii. 12, "None of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." 1 Pet. ii. 8, "Whereunto also, they were appointed." This is repeated in Acts xxviii. 26, 27, in somewhat different language; and it is one of the most frequent occasions of objection. But the difficulty is removed at once when we remember, it is only a mode of speech, and nothing more.

(5.) Physical terms are applied to the soul and its states, as though the soul were itself a material object, and governed by material laws admitting of no power to the contrary. This ought never to be forgotten. Eph. v. 14, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee life." Eph. ii. 1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sin." Col. iv. 5, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." Col. ii. 12, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him." 1 Cor. x. 12, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

(6.) Universal terms are employed, and are left to be limited by the context, by other texts, or by the nature of the subject. Here the artlessness of the Bible shines forth conspicuous, on every page. Phil. iv. 13, "I can do all things through Christ," *i. e.*, "I can endure all sorts of adversity." Eph. v. 24, "Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything;" *i. e.*, in what is right. So Col. iii. 22. 2 Cor. v. 17, "Behold all things are become new;" *i. e.*, Your heart is renewed in its affections. 1 Jno. iii. 9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" *i. e.*, does not habitually disobey God.

(7.) Things are said to be done, and events to

transpire, when the meaning is, they were attempted to be done, or, it seemed as though they were done. Exod. vii. 11, "The magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments." Rev. xx. 1–6, &c. This last passage is a symbolical description of events to transpire in the history of the world; and the writer describes them as though he saw them. But how foolish to regard him as foretelling the descent of a literal angel, with a key and chain, the binding of Satan and his literal imprisonment in a bottomless pit! the raising of the dead and the coming of Christ to reign in person at Jerusalem for a thousand years!

(8.) Hyperboles, or exaggerated comparisons, are a fruitful source of perplexity. They are the most common in the Psalms and prophets; and very general in all oriental writings. But they are to be explained, by a reference to the subject of which they speak. Common sense is the remedy for all such difficulties. "He hath broken my teeth with gravel stones," Lam. iii. 16. "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies," Ps. lviii. 3. "Put on the whole armor of God," Eph. vi. 11; *i. e.*, arm yourselves with every Divine resource against evil.

(9.) Things contingently, or morally impossible,

are spoken of as absolutely and purely impossible. Gen. xxxvii. 4, "They hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him." There was no want of ability in the case. Jno. xii. 39, "Therefore they could not believe." 1 Jno. iii. 9, "He cannot sin, because he is born of God." 2 Pet. ii. 14, "Eyes that cannot cease from sin." Gal. v. 17, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." In this last case, there is, as in all the rest, no want of ability, but of opportunity, through the strife of the two opposing principles. As in the declaration of Joshua, "Ye cannot serve God;" that is, they could not serve their idols and God at the same time. The same was the saying of our Lord: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." These forms of speech are among the most common in our language; yet out of no deeper sources than these have sprung many of the bitterest controversies between Christians, and many of the most profound objections against the Bible!

(10.) Things inconsistent with the character and will of God, are said to be impossible, when there is no absolute impossibility in the case. Mark vi. 5, "And he could do there no mighty works." Tit. i. 2, "Which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

X. But, finally, the grand fountain of difficulties, in respect to the meaning of the Bible, is in the

heart of man. By sin it is naturally ignorant, stupid, and incapable (so to speak) of all spiritual knowledge. The want of a willing mind throws an eclipse over the entire sacred volume; objections a thousand times answered, are a thousand times brought up and insisted on; and it would verily seem as though it were easy to understand all other books; they being plain, consistent, and true; while the Bible is held to be precisely the opposite, dark, unreasonable, subtle, and hard to be understood.

But not without forethought has the Bible been sent on its mission. Divine wisdom has imparted to its pages that holy simplicity, that purity and truth, which is without stain, and whereby human duplicity is put to shame. By its own inherent resources, it is slowly rising over all objections, like the sun over the mists of the morning. Every passing year throws clearer light on its path. Its truthfulness is being daily vindicated against all the world. The highest names of science rejoice in its spotless integrity. Perpetual success attends it. Its path is toward glory and immortality. No old age overtakes it. Not a blush of conscious dishonesty ever reddens on its cheek. Descending from the earliest dawn of literature, it will survive to regenerate all literature, and to infuse new vigor,

for long generations, into all the powers of the human mind. Weakness in the Bible there is none. Contradictions? There are spots on the sun, but no contradictions in the Bible. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE MORAL POWER OF THE BIBLE, WITH REFERENCE TO ITS SOURCES.

The moral power of the Bible, that is, its influence over the hearts and actions of men and nations, is a phenomenon which its enemies have never attempted to deny. We well remember, after the lapse of nearly half a century, the time, manner, and language in which this peculiarity of the Bible was first made known to us. It was on the afternoon of a bright Sabbath, and from the lips of a Scottish patriarch; said he: "The Bible is the best book in the world." It sounded something grand, yes, sublime, in our youthful thoughts, that one particular book should have this pre-eminence; and the saying has lost none of its truth, or sublimity, since that day, in our view. We like its comprehensiveness. It expresses all that can be said of the Bible, in one brief Saxon sentence. It implies that the Bible wields over the world by far a greater amount of

moral and intellectual power, than all other books; and this fact the history of the world certainly demonstrates. The Bible of a truth is the best book in the world. It is the primate of all books, and will never have a successor.

It is the fountain-head of our purest and most influential literature. In the arts and sciences, it is the source of all progress. Poetry is ever ready to confess its obligations to this Book of books. There is no oratory in the halls of learning, of legislation, or of justice, but ever seeks to refresh itself from the pages of the Bible. Painting has hence derived its sublimest conceptions. All genius rekindles at its divine touch. What a storehouse of thought, of mental impulse, there is in this one familiar volume! Men of the loftiest mental endowments find in it themes of investigation, illimitable. The entire religious life of our world, so expansive and joyous, has its springs in the Word of God. Time itself will end, before the magic stimulus of this one book will cease to be felt in the minds of men.

It is certain the world is never weary with its study; for there is more patient study expended upon it every day, than upon all other books put together. There are more books traceable to the Bible, than to any and all books in existence. It furnishes themes for the pulpits of Christendom,

and spiritual food for millions of the best disciplined minds in all lands. It is read in all Christian families daily. It is the grand book of reference and final appeal in all schools of theology. The missionary carries it beyond the seas, into the midst of heathenism, not doubting but, by its aid, he will soon lay all the idols prostrate. It is brought to the bedside of the dying, as the only balm of the weary heart, in the valley and shadow of death. The anxious inquirer, seeing behind him the wrath to come, and constrained to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" comes to the Bible for an answer; and there he finds a Saviour. And what is wonderful, in the cell of the maniac, its words of truth and soberness mysteriously awe the children of wretchedness into attention, and bring even over their troubled countenances, the sunshine of the love of God.

It has been more signally preserved, during a longer succession of ages, than any other book. It has outlived more intense criticism; it has been oftener copied and printed; it has been oftener interdicted by kings than any other book. Tyrants have hated it with unquenchable hatred; for it has done more than any other agency to confound their counsels, and mar their ambition. In the hands of patriots, it is the sacred standard of liberty and right. Kings are sworn to the duties of their office

on the holy Bible. In courts of justice it is the guardian angel of truth and equity, and to kiss that book is to stand in the very presence of the King of kings. Against infidelity, atheism, and delusion it is the only successful champion, that never surrenders; these giant evils cower and stand abashed in its presence, as guilt and shame in the presence of innocence. The Bible is translated into more languages, and is actually read by a greater proportion of the world, and is also more revered and loved than any other book. There is everywhere a more ready deference to its sentiments, on all the great questions that perplex men, than there is, or ever was accorded to any other volume. It is esteemed as worthy of the faith of all men, and the enterprise is on foot, to place it as soon as possible in every family on the globe.

What book, we ask, obtains such universal honor as this? There is none worthy of such honor, but itself. He, to whom was given more wisdom, than usually falls to the lot of men, said, in the olden time, "where the word of a king is, there is power." This is true of the Bible, with an emphasis; for it is the word of a King—even the King of kings, the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only wise God; and through all lands, and through all time, there has gone with it, a power as wonderful as it

has been blessed. During these last three hundred years especially, has this power been felt on a large scale. See its effect, first on Luther; then on Germany, and then on England. This last, indeed, owes all its greatness, political, intellectual, and moral, more directly to the Bible, than to all other causes under God. Her rise dates only back to her reception of the Bible. When she bade it welcome, in spite of her kings and bishops, from the hands of the heroic William Tyndale, a martyr of noble memory, she was but a third rate kingdom, inferior even to Portugal on the sea. But as soon as the Bible was read in her homes, and preached in her pulpits, and believed by her people, a new glory burst on her path. The commerce of the world fell into her hands. Science was born, and grew in such prosperity as the world had never seen before. The whole face of England was changed. Wealth flowed into all her ports; the colonies of other nations, the sources of luxury and power, yielded to her arms, almost without a blow. In a very short time, they said, she swayed the sceptre of an empire, on which the sun never set!

But, in the meanwhile, the nations which banished the Scriptures, and put in their place the traditions of the Roman Church, were struck with decay. The wealth of Mexico and Peru, and the jewels of

the distant East, could not preserve their dominions. As there is no rising from political and social degradation, without the Bible, so there is no permanency in civilization, or power, without it. Ruin immediately overtakes every people that rejects the Word of God. All this does the history of the world prove; and if so, then it is manifest, that the power of this divine book is, as yet, only in its infancy, slowly expanding into its full and ripe maturity. What will it be, when, in the course of ages, it has reached, enlightened, and purified, the great heart of universal humanity?

What then, is the secret of this power? what are the elements of which it consists? We answer, the secret of its power is in the fact, that it is from God, and in its adaptation to all the manifold wants of man's dependent, spiritual nature.

I. Thus, in the first place, of all books claiming a Divine origin, the Bible alone sets forth the right law of moral conduct.

Men have wearied themselves to this hour, with their attempts to settle the first principles of right and wrong. Nor is there any prospect of a speedy agreement among philosophers, as to what these first principles are. On the other hand, how authoritative, and consistent, have been the teachings of the

Bible, on this subject, from the first. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." No other book ever announced such a form of words, embracing with such matchless brevity, and yet with such infinite amplitude, the entire rudiments and essentials of all law; simple enough to be understood by a child, and deep enough to task all the energies of the wisest of men. Wherever these words are pronounced, men recognize in them a divine power over the conscience, at once peculiar and impressive; and this recognition is the ready response of the soul, to the voice of its Creator.

All was uncertainty, till these words were announced. With a calmness, and a clearness, that is divine, they settle for ever the great law of morals for every creature, placing it on none of the shifting foundations of human expediency, but on the solid immovable basis of the sovereignty of God; thus commending it to the universal conscience of the world, and binding all men to the duty of obedience, by the most august of all sanctions, the holy and unchangeable will of God. Here lies the strength of the law on the hearts of men, its rightness, and its righteous sanctions; not its rightness only, but the just and solemn penalties by which it is guarded. Such is the law of moral conduct in the

Bible; and such is one element of its wonderful power over men. It goes down into the conscience, and directs the very first motions of action in the soul. It places you in the very presence of the eternal Jehovah; and gives you His will to obey, on the authority wherewith He is invested.

II. In the next place, the view which the Bible presents of man's condition, contributes to its singular influence over him.

The condition of man, as a child of sin and sorrow, has been a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, from the beginning; causing one to plunge into Atheism, another into Fatalism, a third into sensuality, and a fourth into despair. The question has been, not simply why is sin in the world? but what is man's relation to the first sin, of the first man?

Many of the devoutest and deepest thinkers have maintained that, since the first sin of the first man, sin has descended in human nature, by the laws of generation, the child from the moment of its existence being, in actual character, what Adam was after he had voluntarily broken the divine law. According to this view, our relation to the first sin, is the relation of a necessary effect, to its antecedent and necessary cause. But the results of this view, have been to perplex the whole subject of moral

government, and along with it, the whole character of God Himself. An awful obstinacy has been engendered in the minds of thousands; they have cast off all fear of God, and regarded religion as a thing overwhelmed in self-contradictions. Others, professing indeed to hold this view, have governed their hearts rather by the practical demands of the divine law, to the neglect of their false theory; in happy inconsistency, refusing to walk according to their own faith.

To the question, why sin is in the world, various have been the answers. Some have said, it is here because men existed in another world, sinned there, and were sent here into a state of sin, as into a house of correction. Others have viewed it as an essential thing to the display of the divine glory; decreed as the means of greater good. But it may be truly affirmed, that man has not improved in his moral condition under any of these theories. They have not met the rational demands of his moral nature. They have thrown no light upon his path; they have afforded no sanitary influence to his heart.

What then is the Scriptural view of man's present condition? The Bible tells how the first sin took place; it defines sin, always with strict precision, to be transgression of law; it affirms every man's personal responsibility, his perfect freedom, and indefea-

sible obligation to keep the whole law of God, in all its requirements; and it declares that every man shall answer for his sins, as deeds, voluntarily done in his body, contrary to the will of his rightful sovereign. The relation, therefore, which every man holds to sin, according to the Bible, is that of an independent and adequate cause to its appropriate effect; and consequently, the relation of every man to the first sin, is that he voluntarily re-enacts it in his own person. Left to the freedom of his will, and to those constitutional tendencies inherited in his descent from Adam, he sins, as did Adam, and inherits the curse. Such, as we gather it, is the doctrine of the Bible. Nowhere is sin said to be a quality, or property, or bias of nature; it is always an act, a thing of choice, against which all nature protests. You will search the Bible in vain, for any legal, or moral, or personal conglomeration of all mankind into one literal representative person, responsible for all, acting, and sinning for all; and in whom all lived, died, and were condemned. Nor in the Bible will you find any evidence of man's pre-existence; nor indeed one sentence of mystery in reference to this whole subject. It maintains fearlessly the doctrine of man's probation, the righteous moral government of God, administered in an economy of grace, and in due time to be vindicated

from all charges of injustice. It calmly assures every man, that as he sows now, so shall he reap hereafter; and that for his own deeds, every man shall give account unto God. This is one element of its mighty power over the world. "What is the most solemn thought"—said one to the great Webster—"that ever passed through your mind?" After some moments of profound silence, the statesman answered, with a countenance clothed in solemnity: "The most solemn thought that ever passed through my mind, is the thought of man's responsibility to God." It is just so; and the Bible confirms it. That holy book, speaking to the world in God's stead, assures every man, high and low, rich and poor, bond and free, that he is accountable to God for his conduct; it puts every man on his good behavior, for time and eternity; and human nature being what it is, men must take heed to their ways, with such a system before them, sanctioned as it is by all the solemnities of the Godhead. The Bible allows no man to merge himself into any other person, or to palm off his transgressions as things born with him, as his hands or his eyes. It performs the office of Nathan, and with uplifted hand, and finger direct, it declares to every sinner chargeable with sin, "thou art the man."

III. Another element of power in the Bible is, the view there given of the character of God.

This is a point of the most vital importance. If the Bible had failed here, it had failed altogether. For it is a law, as inexorable as the law of gravitation, that the individual and nation will be in moral character according to the character of the deity they worship. The condition of all heathen nations is proof of this. The attributes they ascribe to their idols, they copy in their daily conduct; and these attributes are the offspring of their benighted and selfish hearts. So that they are literally gods to themselves; and hence they will never rise, by their own resources, out of the fearful pit into which their sins have plunged them. We do not mean to say, that the heathen have no powers of mind to know the attributes of the true God, nor, that they cannot discover these attributes from the world around them. This is our position: that copying as they ever do, in their own conduct, the attributes of their idols, which have previously been suggested out of their own hearts, they never will, in this process, arrive at the knowledge of God as he is, and so will never rise from the depths of sin into which they have fallen. They must first be taught out of the Bible, the character of God.

But in vain do we search the wide world, for just

conceptions of God, until we open the Scriptures. Ask the wisest of ancient philosophers, the man whose opinions governed the schools even down to the time of Bacon, ask him, who, or what is God? His answer is—"The universe is God." Or, his great rival, whose fame is scarcely at all inferior, and whose philosophy tinged all Christian theology for a thousand years, ask Plato, and he says—"God is an extremely subtle matter, such as air." Now if these are the loftiest conceptions of the wisest of men, what must be the conceptions of the ignorant common people. Surely, well did Paul say: "The world by wisdom knew not God."

But open the Bible, and your soul is immediately filled with awe, as though you were suddenly brought into the presence of the King of kings, a glorious Being like to no mere imagination of the wicked human heart. Here is the true God revealed in his true character. He is infinite in Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness and Truth. You are disposed to veil your face at the sight, to tremble and adore.

"God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. God that made the world, and all that are therein, seeing He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all, life and breath, and all

things. Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art, or man's device. And the times of this ignorance, God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere, to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Such is the view of the divine character as given in the Scriptures; and in the Scriptures alone. The God of the Bible is the Creator, Proprietor, and Judge of all; infinitely holy, just and merciful; slow to anger, yet by no means willing to clear the guilty and impenitent; condescending to the lowest of His creatures, providing a sacrifice for sin; willing to forgive the penitent, but punishing the rebellious with the just penalty of His eternal law. And such precisely are the conceptions of the Divine Being, necessary to the formation of a pure, and stable moral character in man; and they constitute an important element of the power of the Bible.

The man who reveres, and worships, and loves the God of the Bible, will give evidence of a pure, and holy life. With open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, he will be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

IV. There is another source of this power which belongs to the Bible: it reveals the only persuasive, by which the human heart is ever won to the love and pursuit of holiness, viz.: Christ crucified, as a sacrifice for sin, and commended to the soul by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

In this particular, the Bible stands alone, and pre-eminent, like some mighty mountain towering above the plain, high above all other pretended revelations. The remedy, by which the dread waywardness, and wickedness of man's heart are removed, is the Bible's own. Untaught of God, man could not so much as have imagined such a remedy possible. If, by some chance, he had reached that idea, then his conscience would have represented it as wholly improbable. Finite, and guilty, and perplexed, how could he have arrived at any such knowledge, as that revealed in Christ? God manifest in the flesh; suffering as man; rising from the dead; atoning, and interceding for the chief of sinners—impossible! And even so

must sinful men have reasoned, respecting the work of the Holy Spirit on the penitent heart. Here was a mystery too deep for all human understanding, or discovery.

But it is through this very mystery of the Spirit, and of God manifest in the flesh, applied to the convicted and penitent heart, that the soul is ever purified from the love of sin, and made willing and stable, in the love, and service of God. This is the only sovereign balm for sin, the only sure method of salvation from disobedience, and death eternal. Neither science, nor law, nor learning, nor the voice of nature, heard like music in the deep places of the soul, has ever yet accomplished the renovation of the soul. It is Christ crucified, that is the power of God, and the wisdom of God to this grand end. The savage, dwelling in habitations of horrid cruelty, has not been able to withstand it; though guilty of a thousand crimes, he has found peace and hope, by faith in the Son of God. Idolatry, and every form of human wickedness, has yielded to the charms of the Cross of Christ. Its victories fill every land. There is not a saint in heaven, but owes his blessedness to the mystery of the cross; for such is the profound death to all holiness, superinduced upon the heart, by transgression, that no means short of the

blood of Christ, has ever sufficed to raise one poor sinner from its wretched embrace. The sinner has withstood all the convictions of his reason, all the terrors of his conscience, all the bounties of nature, all the miseries of sin long endured; but this—the death of Jesus, an atonement for his sins, a pledge of God's willingness to pardon and save him—this, he has not been able to withstand. Oh! the divine power of the cross of Christ! It has wrought miracles, and alone can work the miracle of subduing, and saving the soul, to the love and service of God. And because this is the great theme of the Bible, therefore it possesses a power over the world, at once peculiar, and pre-eminent. It is, in this respect, the best Book in all the world.

V. And summing up all its characteristics in one, and in one sentence pointing to the grand source, whence all its peculiar characteristics proceed, it is the inspired Word of God.

Though good men wrote it, and though it bears all the marks of their mental peculiarities, so that it really conveys the personal belief, and extended reasonings of Job, Moses, Samuel, David, Ezra, Isaiah, Daniel, Paul, and John; yet, nevertheless, there is in it, over and above all, the divine infalli-

bility and energy of the Spirit of God, of Him who made the soul, and at whose voice the soul is wont to awake, as a harp at the touch of the minstrel.

The Bible is the Word of God, therefore it goeth forth conquering, and to conquer among the nations; often attacked, but never defeated; outliving all opposition; disarming prejudice; converting its enemies; claiming, because it is worthy of, universal regard; in courts of justice, in senates, in halls of legislation, in the chamber of the dying, in seminaries of learning, and at the family altar, everywhere, the mightiest among the mighty; pulling down the strongest holds of Satan; giving strength to the weak; hope to the oppressed, and joy to those in sorrow; not like any other book; its powers for good to man increasing, as the centuries sweep onward; guiding the nations as truly as individuals into the paths of peace; overthrowing the dominion of sin, and imparting to all who receive it, a blessed foretaste of eternal life with God in glory. In the language of one who imitated with rare felicity, the pious George Herbert, we say:

The Bible! that's the Book, the Book indeed,
The Book of books;
On which who looks,
As he should do, aright, shall never need

Wish for a better light,
To guide him in the night;
Or when he hungry is, for better food,
To feed upon,
Than this alone.
A Book, to which none may be compared
For excellence;
Pre-eminence
Is proper to it, and cannot be shared.
Divinity alone
Belongs to it, or none.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

I.

ON MAXIMS.

In the chapter on Maxims we have said, that every science has its maxims, or first principles. This is true even of the science of law, supposed to be one of the most shifting and uncertain of all departments of human knowledge; and it may be not out of place, to record some of these maxims, on these pages, seeing they throw a strong light on the subject of interpretation. From this record, it will appear that whatever the science of law may be in its practice, it is certainly well and deeply founded in its principles. They bear on their face the impress of sound sense, and are as self-evident as any decisions of the human mind need be, to secure them

all due reverence. There has been a latent contempt for lawyers perhaps in the schools of theology; and perhaps it has been mutual, the disciples of one science despising the peculiar pursuits of the disciples of the other. Now, while we defer to none in our respect for men, whose chief business in life has been the study of theology, we must be permitted to say, that weighing well these maxims in the science of law, we would most heartily rejoice were there no other theories, or doctrines propounded from the pulpit, but such as are consistent with them. Our theology would suffer no damage, by letting go its antique and somewhat infirm method of constructing its systems, and taking instead, the system presented in these fundamental truths of a much despised science.

In the case of theologians, the mind has apparently wrought out a theory of religion, often under the embarrassing influences of a vitious tradition, or with a written instrument in view, many parts of which have been misunderstood, and others most grievously perverted. But in the case of teachers of law, the mind has had in view simply its own innate sense of right and wrong, the clear, honest decisions of an impartial judgment, guided by a desire to enact that which is just and equal, between man and man. The consequence has been, that while theologians,

in the name of religion and the Bible, have announced and often adopted principles at manifest war with common sense, and common justice, and directly subversive of all equity even in the Divine government, lawyers have stood firm as the advovates of principles, which the understandings and consciences of all men must receive at once as disinterested, just, and true, calculated to work no injury, and representing justice even in God, the Supreme Lawgiver and Judge, as pure, incorruptible, and jealous for the rights and happiness of the meanest of His creatures.

We have not attempted to follow any distinct method in the selection and arrangement of these maxims. The Latin form has in some instances been retained, with a translation.

LEGAL MAXIMS.

1. Summa ratio est quæ pro religione facit. If in any case the laws of God and man are at variance, the former are to be regarded as the higher law.

2. The law consists not in particular instances and precedents, but in the reason of the law; for reason is the life of the law—nay, the common law itself is nothing else but reason.

3. The sense of the words of a law is to be inter-

preted according to their fair and ordinary meaning, at the time of its enactment.

4. Optimus interpres legum consuetudo. Custom is the best interpreter of laws.

5. General words shall be aptly restrained according to the subject matter, or person to which they refer.

6. Where a statute will bear two interpretations, one contrary to plain sense, the other agreeable thereto, the latter shall have the preference.

7. No statute shall be construed in such a manner as to be inconvenient, or against reason. A latent ambiguity may be removed by evidence. In the absence of ambiguity, no exposition shall be made, which is opposed to the express words of the instrument. It is not allowed to interpret where there is no need of interpretation.

8. The law will judge of a deed by looking at the whole.

9. He, who considers merely the letter of an instrument, goes but skin deep into its meaning.

10. Nothing is so consonant with equity, as that every contract should be dissolved by the same means which rendered it binding.

11. No man shall take advantage of his own wrong.

12. He, who does an act through the medium of another, is in law considered as doing it himself.

13. Necessity is no law. Where the act is compulsory and not voluntary, and where there is not a consent and election on the part of the doer, the law charges no man with guilt.

14. The law cannot confer a favor on one to the loss and injury of another. An act in law shall prejudice no man.

15. The law shall not, through the medium of its executive capacity, work a wrong.

16. The practice of the court, is the law of the court.

17. When the court cannot take judicial notice of a fact, it is the same as if the fact had not existed. Quod non apparet, non est.

18. Lex semper dabit remedium. There is no wrong in law without a remedy.

19. It were infinite for the law to consider the causes of causes and their impulsions, one of another; therefore it contenteth itself with the immediate cause, and judgeth of acts by that, without looking further.

20. The act of God injures no man.

21. The law does not seek to compel a man to do that which he cannot possibly perform.

22. Ignorance of the law does not excuse.

23. The law, in some cases, judges of a man's previous intentions by his subsequent acts.

24. It is a principle of natural justice that the intent and the act must both concur to constitute the crime.

25. Whosoever grants a thing, is supposed, also, tacitly to grant that without which the grant itself would be of no effect.

26. Nemo punietur sine injuria. Punishment follows crime only; the innocent go free.

27. Hæreditas nunquam ascendit. Heirship does not ascend but descend.

28. That which cannot be done directly, cannot be done indirectly.

29. The presumption of innocence shall stand until guilt is proved.

30. Ubi eadem est ratio, eadem est lex. Like reasons make like laws.

31. The express mention of one thing, implies the exclusion of all others. Rom. xiv., 12. "So then, every man shall give account of *himself* unto God."

32. Nemo debet bis puniri pro uno delicto. No man ought to be punished twice for the same offence.

33. Dolus circuitu non purgatur. However long a fraud may run, it is still a fraud.

How admirably many of these legal maxims apply to the science of sacred interpretation, and to the whole groundwork of religion! How clear the

vein of sound common sense and justice running through them! As axioms they spring naturally from the primary conceptions and decisions of the human mind; and, therefore, they cannot but touch the soul of all truth. Framed in distinct view of the relations existing between man and man, they throw a strong and steady light on many of the deepest problems of the divine moral government, and on the relations of man universally with his Creator and Judge. Reason is stamped upon them, and that stamp gives them value and currency over the whole domain of truth. Would theologians but acquaint themselves thoroughly with these maxims, they would assuredly be saved from adopting some of the absurdities into which they fall, in reference to the higher science of Religion. For, although there is no Gospel in mere law, yet, the moral law of the Bible and its principles constitute the substantial and immovable basis on which the Gospel stands. There is no comprehending the need of the Gospel, but through a knowledge of that law. "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and the knowledge of sin brings with it, the knowledge of the need of a Saviour. Hence, to go astray in our notions of the law, is to necessitate our going astray in respect to the Gospel. The interpretation of the the law, and of man's abilities under the law,

of the penalties by which it is sustained, and of the grounds on which the guilt of its violation is charged on man, are points of fundamental importance. To fail to discover the meaning of the Bible, on any of these matters, is a grievous error in a minister of the Gospel; to present precisely the meaning of the word of God, on these various topics, is to possess the sword of the word of God, and to wield it for the conviction and conversion of the souls of men.

We cannot refrain from the reflection how plainly these first principles in the science of law, refute that absurd dogma in which some theologians take such strange delight, viz., that the race of mankind existed, sinned, and was condemned in the sin and person of Adam. It would be a new thing under the sun for such ideas to be uttered in courts of justice. Nor can their utterance in class-rooms be accounted for on any other ground than that of theologians claiming for themselves privileges granted to no other class of men; among which is the privilege of saying what is intrinsically at variance with reason, without the inconvenience of having their sayings doubted.

II.

WHAT IS IT TO PROVE A DOCTRINE FROM SCRIPTURE?

THIS is an important and practical question; and we shall proceed here to give it an answer, because of its direct bearing on our main subject of interpretation.

1. To prove a doctrine from Scripture, it is not enough that we quote a text, or texts, which sound like the doctrine. The sound of Scripture may be the very opposite of the sense of Scripture. It would not profit a doctrine to have the mere sound of a text in its favor, while the sense of the same text condemned it. Acts viii. 38, "They went both down into the water," sounds as if baptism was by immersion; but it does not prove it. Matt. xxvi. 26, "This is my body," sounds as though transubstantiation were taught in Scripture; but it does not prove it. Heb. vi. 6, "If they shall fall away," sounds as if the doctrine of Christians falling from grace and perishing in hell, were indeed true; but

it does not prove it. Rom. viii., 7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity to God," sounds as though the mind itself were sinful, and essentially hatred towards God; but it merely proves that the actions of the mind, in the case of the sinner, are opposed to God. Matt. xvi., 18, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," is often quoted to prove that the church is founded on Peter. Alas! if it had been, it had long since perished. "As in Adam all die"—1 Cor. xv., 22, sounds as though all mankind were seminally, legally, personally alive in Adam, and died in his death; but no train of ideas was so infinitely distant from the thoughts of the Apostle. According to his meaning, transparent on the very face of his words, in their proper connection, no such absurd transcendentalisms can be got out of them. Something more than sound is required to prove a doctrine from Scripture.

2. It is not enough to quote passages quoted by others. This is blindly trusting to authority; but if we may judge from some conspicuous examples, authority in such matters is very like a broken reed. The Westminster theologians quote James iii., 2, "in many things we offend all," to prove that no man can keep the commandments of God; it proves, simply that all men sin; but is wholly silent as to their inability. By the same theologians, 1 John

v., 7, is quoted to prove the doctrine of the Trinity; and yet that passage, it is well known, does not belong to John's Epistle at all. Jas. v., 16, "Confess your faults one to another," is quoted to prove the doctrine of the confessional; but it actually disproves it, by proving that Christians are to acknowledge their faults to one another, without reference to priests. Rom. ii., 11, "There is no respect of persons with God," is quoted to prove the salvation of all men; it simply means that God does not prefer Jews to Gentiles, but is equally just to all. 1 Tim. ii., 5, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," is quoted to disprove the divinity of our Lord; it proves only his humanity, and says nothing about his divinity. So it requires something more than the mere repetition of oft quoted texts to prove a doctrine from the word of God.

3. Neither is it sufficient to quote a text proving only something implied in the doctrine. A thing implied in a doctrine is not the doctrine.

There lies before us the examination sermon of the Rev. Naph. Daggett, D.D., professor of divinity in Yale College, in 1756; and also his Latin exegesis, written out legibly and very neatly in his own hand-writing, and now more than one hundred years old. The latter is on the question, "Did the

human soul of Christ exist previous to the incarnation?" The author takes the affirmative, and quotes Col. i., 15, "The first born of every creature;" John xvii., 5, "O, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was;" John vi., 62, "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before," to prove his doctrine. But though these texts do indeed prove certain things implied in the pre-existence of Christ, previous to the incarnation, they by no means prove the pre-existence of his human soul.

The same imperfect logic is very common. For instance, to prove that the sin of our first parents is laid to the charge of all their posterity, a text is quoted to prove all men sinners. But all men may be sinners, in many ways, without its being true that God charges them all with the guilt of the first sin. Again. To prove that Christians actually fall away in many cases, and perish in hell, texts are quoted (we suppose because no others can be found) proving that Christians *may* possibly fall away and perish. You have not proved any man a thief, by proving his ability to steal. So of the divinity of our Lord; you have not disproved it, by quoting one, or any number of texts proving that he was man. For one text, and there are many such,

asserting that he was God, settles the question. To prove some shred, or fragment of a doctrine is not enough. When the ostrich hides its head in the sand, it is not quite covered from the sight, nor safe from the arrow of the hunter. Alas! how often men play the ostrich, with their doctrines and the Bible.

4. To prove a doctrine from Scripture, you must find the sense of Scripture, asserting the whole doctrine, in the same, or equivalent terms, in all its length and breadth, clearly and not in such a way as to require any labored efforts to make the proof appear. The doctrine and the Scripture must be one and the same proposition, in sense, and not in words only. This perfect agreement, or coincidence between the proof and the thing to be proved, is the only solid foundation on which all doctrines must rest.

It may indeed turn out that you will find it necessary to remove some ambiguity from the text, or some objection alleged on the strength of its authority; but, if there are texts plainly and unequivocally asserting the doctrine, to be found, these are always to be taken in preference to any others. For any process of interpretation, however well conducted, will throw a shade of doubt on the point to be proved. There is a natural and strong conviction in the minds of most men, that perspicuity and

directness belong to the Word of God, dispensing with all elaborate efforts to explain it.

If the doctrine to be proved passes by a name not known in the Bible, a name perhaps, that has arisen in controversy, or through convenience, then it may be necessary to state it in its simplest elements, so that the quotations from Scripture may exactly cover it. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is not known by that name in the Bible, but when we state it in its simplest form, it is precisely covered and proved by Matt. xxviii., 19, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." So also, of the doctrine of total depravity. It is not found in Scripture under that name; but it is established fully by the words—"There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not;" "There is none righteous, no not one."

To prove a doctrine then, from the Bible, we must establish a manifest oneness of meaning between the Scripture and the doctrine. Unless this is done, nothing is done. Nor can we refrain from saying, that all our investigations into confessions of faith, have deeply impressed us with the conviction, that in this respect, they are remarkably deficient. They often quote passages constituting no proof of their doctrines whatever. Much of the quotation in the pulpit is also of the same character. It is a standing

complaint that candidates for the ministry are deficient in this particular; and the occasion of it, probably is, the purely metaphysical method pursued in their instruction.

This is a subject deserving the special attention of all Sabbath school teachers and students of the Bible. No attainment is so earnestly to be desired, as that of being able to quote directly and pointedly the proof texts of all our doctrines, from the Scriptures. It is an indispensable qualification of every religious teacher. How much evil is done, how many good opportunities are lost, for lack of it! With what power does the sermon appeal to the hearer's heart, when the perfect harmony between it and the Bible is made clearly and undeniably to appear.

III.

OTHER SYSTEMS.

It formed no part of our original design to speak of the labors of others, only in the most general terms; yet it may serve as some apology for what we have attempted, in this treatise, and as a criterion of our correctness, to notice somewhat briefly, the rules laid down by some recent writers on this science. In our sketch of the history of Interpretation, it was manifest, the importance of having a general system of principles was very early understood. All indeed, who have made any serious attempt to study the Bible, have confessed the value of such a system.

It was only after we had completed our list of Axioms and Rules, in this treatise, that the desire arose in our mind to know what principles had been proposed by interpreters in Great Britain and this country, from the revival of Biblical study in the last century, to our own times. This would bring

the progress of the science more directly under our eye; and enable the student and reader to judge of the various principles which have been, from time to time, employed, by the leading expositors of the Word of God.

Our chapter must not run to an unreasonable length, and therefore we shall select only a few names, as a specimen of others, more or less known in the religious and literary world.

DR. JOHN BROWN.

He was the cotemporary of Doddridge, and Doddridge immediately succeeded Matthew Henry, deservedly known as the "Great Commentator." Brown, in his self-interpreting Bible, a work which keeps its place yet in the hands of thousands, has given a series of rules for the work of interpretation. He was probably led, both to the idea of a *self-interpreting* Bible, and to that of arranging a series of exegetical laws, from the fact that neither Henry nor Doddridge had condescended to any such undertaking. He was proverbially a sagacious and good man; whose sound common sense and cool judgment raised him to a level with the best critics and expounders of the Bible. The following are his Rules, somewhat abbreviated.

1. Let us pray for the influence of the Holy Spirit.

2. Being renewed in our minds, we ought to search the Bible.

3. We must earnestly study to reduce all our Scriptural knowledge to practice.

4. We must begin in an orderly manner, proceeding from the plain, to the obscure.

5. We must form in our minds a brief collection of the most plain histories, doctrines, laws, &c., that they may serve as a criterion for our understanding the others.

6. Not only must every passage be understood, in harmony with the analogy of the faith, but with the scope and tendency of the book, or chapter, where it is found.

7. Various texts must be compared.

8. We ought not to content ourselves with any general view of any text, but search out what it intends.

9. Christ being the great subject and end of Scripture, we ought everywhere to search, if we *can* find him.

10. As to the infinite mind of the Holy Spirit, every subject and every event are at once perfectly in view, His words ought always to be understood in the fullest latitude of signification, that the analogy of the faith, and of the context, *can* admit.

11. It is necessary to have the principles of poetry, and of prophecy, and of figurative language, fixed on our minds.

12. Where the writers contradict each other, we must labor to discover their harmony.

13. To obtain an exact knowledge of the Scripture, it is necessary to know the geography of the country, and the chronology, and history of the nation.

14. We must peruse the original Scripture, in humility of mind.

On a review of these rules, we are disposed to infer that their author had not entertained very distinctly before his mind, the essential nature of a rule of interpretation. A rule is something diverse from a direction how to use it, or, a good advice how to prepare our minds for the work of exegesis. It must be a proposition, compelling our assent, as appropriate to, and worthy of its object. It must have an axiomatic force, so as to confirm our decisions, when they are right, and reprove, and restrain us, when they are wrong. Some of the above rules are certainly not at all fitted for a safe interpretation.

DR. SAMUEL DAVIDSON.

Our limits compel us to pass to the notice of a living writer, Dr. Samuel Davidson, of England; who

has however given more attention to this science, than any other individual in his denomination. He is a thorough scholar, and deeply skilled in the higher criticisms of the Bible. But it is quite doubtful, whether his heavy volume will commend itself to the popular mind, as a satisfactory and useful help to the interpretation of the Scriptures. Only one section of 95 pages, out of 750, has been devoted to the most important topic of the book—the statement and illustration of the principles of interpretation. And what is even more remarkable, when we come to discover what these principles are, we find he has but one; expressed in one short sentence: "the *usus loquendi*, or usage of the writers, must be ascertained."

But without controversy, this must be a wonderful principle, if through its aid alone, the whole Bible is to be explained. It must have an omnipotent effect, to accomplish that, on which huge folios have been expended.

It is in truth but sending us to the study of the usage of the Bible, before attempting to ascertain what the Bible means. We must first be sure of the usage, then we can proceed to interpretation. But this is introducing us to a new science, in place of instructing us in one that we desire to understand.

He was fully aware of this, and he has therefore

occupied by far the greater part of the section, in showing how the usage is to be ascertained. Doubtless it is of very great importance to know the *usus loquendi;* but the practical question arises, would a person, for instance, acquainted with the usage of the English language, be, *ipso facto*, qualified for the interpretation of any book, say on English jurisprudence? We think not. There are many things, besides mere roots, and uses of words, which enter into the science of interpretation. There is the relation of one cardinal truth to another, the relation of one argument to another; and the primary meaning of words, a thing in itself distinct from usage—and are all these to be disregarded? Who can make himself believe that mere usage exhausts the whole science of interpretation? when in truth it is only a mere accessory.

The merits of this treatise by Dr. Davidson, do not lie in its presenting a safe and comprehensive system of ultimate principles, such as must serve to guide us in our attempts to understand the Sacred Volume. Its sketch of the history of the science, is learned and interesting; and its quotations of the Old Testament, in the New, are full and instructive; but the volume itself will not serve to popularize the science of interpretation. Men of the schools should lead the popular mind, and not be dead weights on its progress; they should make it fall in love with

the science, and not be for ever studying to remove it out of the way of their comprehension.

G. J. PLANCK.

It may be well to select one German system of modern times, as a specimen, at least, of a class of interpreters in that country, greatly on the increase, and in whose success we feel the deepest fraternal interest. We select that of Prof. G. J. Planck, translated by Dr. Turner, of New York. His principles are:

1. Seek the literal sense of every passage, as it must be afforded, either by the general usage, or by one peculiar to the writer.

2. That is always the true sense of the sacred writer, which, either alone, or at least, as the most natural sense, could be suggested by his expressions to the men for whom he wrote.

3. Constant reference must be had to the character and views, and known principles of the writer. "These three general laws, comprise almost all that can be prescribed to interpreters."

Such a system is too general to be useful. It disposes of the whole subject in too summary a manner, to be satisfactory. It leaves us wholly in the dark

on a multitude of points, where we most deeply feel the need of some practical principles to guide us. It is as though we were inquiring of this author, the way to a certain place within a few miles, and he should gravely give us direction to follow the sun, or keep the North pole in our eye.

B. B. EDWARDS.

We return to our own country; and here, the first name that should with propriety meet us, is that of the true hearted chieftain, Moses Stuart. But apart from his translation of Ernesti's dry and dull treatise, we are not aware, that he has left anything of his own, in the shape of a series of rules in this science. He was wont to say, "the interpretation of language, is as natural to man, as the use of it, and that the laws of interpretation are the practical principles, by which men have always been guided, in interpreting each other's language." Now the collecting and arranging of these principles, we regard as a thing very much to be desired. It would prove a guide to the inexperienced, and a check on the unruly. Above all, it would deliver us, after so long a time, from the deadly influence of a mere traditionary interpretation. For the principles of such a system are fundamental, and independent of all

human authority; they existed before the Fathers; and if the Fathers have interpreted the Bible contrary to these principles, then we forsake the Fathers, and cleave to the principles. They only can guide us right; and by their help, we shall be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us.

We are only sorry that the first of American Biblical students, did not himself leave us such a system. His successor, B. B. Edwards, in an article on the subject, gives us the following:

1. All true interpretation, is founded on grammar and lexicography.

2. Biblical science recognizes the fundamental importance of historical interpretation.

3. Another principle relates to the harmony of the Scriptures, with the discoveries of natural science.

4. The Bible is to be interpreted in perfect consistency with the laws of the human constitution.

5. The interpreter must feel real sympathy with the truths he is studying.

As a logical apparatus, having in view the science of Biblical interpretation, these principles are certainly defective. As propositions, they are not sufficiently defined, to be of much practical value; they should have a sharper edge, to do good service in this work.

PROF. A. NORTON.

He was a leader in his sect; a man of polite learning, and of some depth in the literature of criticism, though not without some signs of being superficial, and narrow in his views. Although the difference between the followers of his creed, and the great body of evangelical interpreters, are by Unitarians sometimes said to arise in the very nature of truth itself; yet on their own admission, many of these differences are owing to the interpretations forced on the Sacred Scriptures. The science of hermeneutics therefore, has not escaped their notice; and they have said, that by this means, they can successfully overthrow the orthodox faith. Prof. Norton, in his statement of reasons, for rejecting the orthodox views of christian doctrine, presents us with the following rules, by which we are to be guided, in ascertaining the sense of the Scriptures:

1. Where the words are capable of more than one meaning, the true meaning is to be determined, solely by a reference to extrinsic considerations.

2. The words themselves can afford us no assistance in determining the meaning intended by the writers.

3. We may reject the literal meaning of a passage,

when we cannot pronounce with confidence, what is its true meaning.

These are Unitarian principles of interpretation. The first thought that arises in our mind, when reflecting on them, is, with such a system of rules, what must have been the author's creed? Nay, with such rules, could he have had any settled creed at all? His last principle puts the literal meaning in every case, at the mercy of all who are unwilling to receive it. If we are not confident of its true meaning, we may reject it. Who, with any remaining reverence for the Bible, would embrace such a principle of exegesis, as that?

The second principle, is a denial of one of the plainest of all facts, in respect to a revelation, viz.: "the sufficiency of words, to convey the meaning of an inspired writer." It was on this very principle, unfortunately, but inevitably, that the author of "God in Christ," alighted, when on his brief journey from the faith of his fathers. His introduction is an elaboration of the principles of Norton. Did it not grow out of a kindred fact in both minds?—the fact, that both refused to receive simpliciter the inspiration of the record? If the words are of no sufficient aid in respect to the meaning, where is the meaning to be ascertained? In all honesty, to interpret the Bible on such principles, is practically to

renounce all candor, and affirm our purpose of interpreting it according to our caprice only. Socinus said of our Lord's divinity, "seeing the thing itself cannot be, I take the least inconvenient interpretation of the words;" and this is an honest confession of the cardinal principle of all such errors as the denial of the Godhead of the Saviour. They are obliged to adopt it, or receive the doctrine they hate. They say, "the thing cannot be," and revelation itself is silenced. But we submit, is this reverential? Can faith in the Word of God consist with such principles? It were altogether more consistent with the principles of honesty for those who seriously adopt such principles, to say at once, "the authority of the Bible, we do not admit;" for in that case, the world would know where they stood. But this professing to submit to the Bible, and at the same moment rebelling against its authority, is unworthy of any sincere mind. Either the Bible is the standard of faith, or it is not. If it is not, then there is an end to all discussion on such points as those above mentioned. But if it is, then in all its clear and unambiguous statements, whether they be such as reason can discover, or such as lie beyond the limits of its powers, we are bound to the simple course of accepting them without a moment's hesitation. The very highest honor and reverence belongs to the Bible;

and we have yet to know the man, willing to accept the supremacy and inspiration of the Bible, who did not stand immeasurably removed from the creed of Unitarianism. A child-like disposition in reference to the reception of the plain and obvious sense of the Scriptures, is a strait gate, through which no Unitarian can enter, without casting away his besetting sin.

PROF. M'CLELLAND.

The latest book, in a systematic form, on this science which we notice, is from the pen of Prof. M'Clelland, of New Brunswick Seminary, N. J. It has been adopted in one or two theological schools; although Dr. Davidson, of England, says of it, "It need scarcely be said that it will not advance the the science of hermeneutics, nor be very acceptable to theologians. A great part of the subject, has been left untouched." Sac. Her. p. 711.

There is an attempt at wit, in this book, which strikes us as very much out of place. But we are astonished, that out of 236 pages, only 146 are devoted to the subject of interpretation! A glance at the maxims and rules, is all that our limits allow. His maxims are four. 1. The object of interpretation is to give the precise sense of the writers.

2. The method of interpreting the Bible, must be the same which we apply to any other book. 3. The sense of Scripture is (in general) one; we must not assign many meanings to a passage. 4. Interpretation of Scripture requires suitable preparation.

His "special rules" are eleven. 1. Carefully investigate the *usus loquendi*. 2. Examine the parallel passages. 3. The consideration of the author's scope helps interpretation. 4. Examine the context. 5. We must know the character, age, sect, and other peculiarities of the writer. 6. Let there be a constant appeal to common sense. 7. Study the tropes and figures. 8. Attend to the Hebrew idioms. 9. Much of Scripture being prophetical, we should acquaint ourselves with the nature and laws of that kind of composition. 10. Allow no interpretation, that will cast a shade of doubt over the perfect purity of our Lord's teachings, or those of his apostles. 11. We must study and apply the art of criticism.

It does not become us to say, all that might be said, of these maxims and *special* rules. We leave them, rather, to the judgment of our readers. But we cannot dismiss this portion of our book, without an expression of a conviction already uttered, that many who have written on this important subject, have not settled in their own minds, what is the true

nature and form of a law in this science. Propositions, in the above instance, are placed among the maxims, which have no relation to the science, whatever; and mere advice is set down among the special rules, as though it were a first truth, or a decision of universal common sense, to which all must submit! Surely this is not what the science of interpretation demands. Neither the nature of the case, nor the laws of sound logic, require any such course as this. From the above imperfect treatise, as well as from some other facts, we strongly incline to the belief, that this cardinal science, on which so much depends, in reference to the spread of the Gospel, and the victory of the kingdom of God, over the ignorance and perverseness of men, is but very little understood; there is certainly very much to be done, even in this country, before it is made to occupy the pre-eminence which belongs to it, both in the pulpit, and in the theological seminary. The blessings of a grateful Church, will follow the man, who wins for the science of interpretation, its proper place, and becoming honor, in the minds of those who love the Bible, and who receive it with all joy, as the infallible Word of God.

IV.

THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF EXEGETICAL INSTRUCTION IN OUR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

THE relation of the instruction given in our theological seminaries, to correct interpretation of the Scriptures, cannot but be very close. It is all but mathematically certain, that the student will carry with him into the sacred desk, the principles and spirit of his instructor in this science; so that for all the purposes of a high moral influence on the ministry, and on the people, whom the ministry serve in the Gospel, there is no station so full of responsibility, none so important, in its influences for good, or for evil, as the station of the professor of sacred hermeneutics. He gives currency to whatever laws of interpretation he may adopt; and they find their way speedily, into every Christian congregation in the land. If he inspires his pupils with right principles; if he infuses into their minds a right enthu-

siasm for the science itself; it is well, he has discharged his duty. But if, on the other hand, the professor fails to kindle in the student's mind a proper zeal for this subject, if he wastes his time on points of but little practical importance, if he proceed in his instructions with more regard to details, and the mere preliminaries of the science, and thus leaves his scholars really ignorant of its grand and fundamental principles, to begin the preaching of the Gospel, without a familiar knowledge of the laws by which the sense of the Word of God is to be ascertained, he is altogether at fault, his influence is injurious.

We hold that, to the student of theology, this science is decidedly the most important of all. It is the basis of all sound doctrine. There is no authority for any doctrine from the pulpit, if it be not found in the records of inspiration. To know that it is there, is the student's only passport to the sacred desk. He ascends that desk to preach the preaching that the Bible bids him. But how shall he do this, if he does not first understand the art of interpreting the Bible? If he fails in this respect, we see not what authority he can have to opens his lips, as an ambassador of Christ.

Here then arises, therefore, an important inquiry, which we suggest with all deference: How, or by

what methods, are our young men taught to interpret the Holy Scriptures? This is not the question, who are the instructors, and what are their qualifications? If pressed to answer such an inquiry as this last, we would say without hesitation, that some of the profoundest scholars of the age occupy the chairs of Biblical exegesis and literature, in our theological seminaries. We can say more. At no previous period have the subsidiary helps to Scriptural interpretation been so complete, nor so perfectly within the reach of all interested in this noble study. Never have the libraries of exegetical literature been so ample, as they are now. The grammars and lexicons of the original languages of the Bible, have arrived at a state of perfectness, such as no age of the world has ever witnessed. And never has the importance of Biblical science been so universally felt, and acknowledged by all classes.

The question, therefore, is not an irrelevant one. It connects itself very closely with the subject of this book, and with the interests of true and undefiled religion. It is: by what methods are our young men instructed in the important, and fundamental science of ascertaining the meaning of the Word of God?

We desire that two things may be taken for granted, in this inquiry: that there is a science,

strictly and properly called the science of interpretation, with its axioms and laws, ascertained and classified, or capable of being ascertained and classified, like the axioms and laws of any other science; and that there is a class of men professedly engaged in teaching this science. Our inquiry is, as to the methods these instructors pursue in the course of their profession? What are the facts in this case? In reply, it may be stated, that the first thing in the way of instruction in this science, to which the student's attention is directed, is the acquisition of the Hebrew language. But the acquisition of the Hebrew language is not necessarily connected with the science of interpretation, in our view of the matter, any more than the acquisition of any other language whatever. It enables the student to read the Scriptures in Hebrew, that is all; or, we might add, it enables him to judge of the correctness of the common translations of the Bible, and perhaps a better appreciation of the rhetorical force and beauty of the Scriptures generally. But it certainly does not impart to him the first maxim, or law of the science of interpretation. With a perfect knowledge of the Hebrew, equal to that of his mother tongue, he is yet a stranger to the first elements of this science. Do all Jews, who, by their education, speak and write Hebrew, as we speak and write

English, understand the principles of interpretation, just in virtue of their knowing the language in which the Old Testament was written? Verily no one will pretend that they do. The acquisition of the Hebrew is very well in its place; but it is not essentially necessary in the study of the particular science before us; at least, no more so, than is the acquisition of the English itself.

But when some little progress is made by the student, in the rudiments of this ancient language, he is then introduced, either to the reading of extracts, or of the Hebrew Bible itself, as the second step in his course. Of course, this is all well; but even in this exercise, the chief point is not the unfolding of the principles of exegesis, in an orderly and logical manner. The object is to perfect the pupil in the grammar of the Hebrew language, to impart a greater facility in his pronunciation, and the correction, it may be, of some loose phrase in our common English translation. Up to this moment, there has been no positive approach to the science itself. All this training, and it generally occupies many months, the student might have received in the common school, without the least suspicion, that he was receiving instruction in the science of interpretation.

The meanwhile, the same course has been progressing in reference to the New Testament in

Greek; with this difference, that the student is supposed to be already master of this language. He is therefore called on, at the outset, to translate certain passages, of a particular book in course; and having a lexicon of the New Testament, he is questioned as to the different meanings there given, of the most important words occurring in the text. As a part also of this exercise, extemporaneous remarks are made by the professor, and in latitudes, where liberty of speech is freer than in others, questions are put by the student, in respect to the meaning of the passage, or of the more prominent difficulties it contains. The same course is pursued, though if memory serves, not so frequently, nor with such minuteness, in the case of the Hebrew Bible. For in this latter instance, the pupils rarely attain to the same facility, which they exhibit in regard to the Greek. The Hebrew language is more fugitive, and difficult of acquisition; and students have less disposition to discuss difficulties, where a thorough knowledge of the language is wanting. To get through a tolerably ready translation, and showing the construction of the chief words, is usually the extent of their anxiety.

Now, it is admitted, that these exercises and extemporaneous criticisms, by the professor, are all necessary and proper enough. In their nature and

tendency, they verge towards the science; but that is all. We cannot be in error, when we say, that with all this preparation, the teaching of the science has not yet begun. This method is not that of the chair of Christian doctrine. Its incumbent would first of all, divide his subject into its natural divisions. He would confine himself and his pupils to the proof of the particular doctrine, which it might be his design to establish; and thus he would proceed, until he had gone over the whole system in all its parts; presenting each and all its divisions, as skillfully, and with as much power of argument and illustration, as he could command. He surely would not direct his pupils, Bible in hand, to read certain portions of the Scriptures, the discourses of our Lord, for example, expatiate on some of their doctrinal bearings, and then dismiss his class, as fully instructed in the science of systematic theology. And yet it might be, that in this way, the entire systematic platform of doctrines might be surveyed, and much useful instruction imparted. But if any professor of systematic divinity should pursue this method, and none other, he would certainly fail in establishing his reputation, as a skillful teacher of Christian doctrine.

Since this treatise has been in process of composition, we have taken care to inquire of several, who

had passed the usual term of study, under the very best instructors, as to the methods pursued, and have been uniformly answered, either that they pursued no particular system, or that they did not distinctly recollect, whether they had studied the science at all! The science, as such, had not been impressed on their attention. Here is the secret, we believe, of the fact, that so many preachers fail in the point of connecting their sermons, distinctly and clearly with the text, which they announce. And in this very particular also, it appears to us, lies another secret, viz.: the inefficiency of the great majority of discourses, delivered from the pulpit. The power of any discourse, for the purposes of convincing and converting the soul, lies, more than anywhere else, in the clear and undeniable foundation of the discourse on the authoritative Word of God. If the sermon rest on the text, and cannot be disjoined from it, then it will both interest and impress the hearer. But is it any wonder, that this is not the case, with a vast majority of discourses, when the art of determining the meaning of the text is but imperfectly understood? because not adequately elaborated, and set forth to their comprehension.

It has been often noticed, as a matter of complaint, that theological students, in many instances, are not apt at the quotation of proof texts from the Scrip-

tures. But important as the ability and aptness to quote proof texts undoubtedly is—that they should understand the science of interpretation, is vastly more important. What other qualification in a minister, can take the place of this? And to us, nothing is more plain, than the mere knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, however perfect, can never impart this one indispensable attainment. The knowledge of all the languages on earth, could not impart it. It is to be taught scientifically, and studied apart, as a thing of the first importance, toward which, the mind is to be directed in all its disciplined energy.

The want of logical method is what we deplore. It is against a fragmentary, and merely rudimental system, that we protest. The details of verbal criticisms, in our view, are wholly out of place, as a substitute for the statement, defence, and illustration of the fundamental laws of this precious science.

But lectures are also given to the classes. This is a step in the right direction; yet, if in these lectures, the whole subject is discussed, it is more than anything our experience has afforded. If they attempt an exposition of the science in a comprehensive and logical form, independently of the mere grammar of the Scriptures, and exhibiting the essential facts and laws, on which all men must consistently proceed, in their attempts to reach the sense of the

Word of God—it would be perfectly satisfactory; it would meet every demand of reason, in the case. In reply, we heard it once said: "We confess, there is no regular system of rules taught, yet the science of interpretation is taught." But if this were true, here then would be an exception by itself; for in respect to no other branch of knowledge, can the same thing be said. Who would think of teaching logic, or natural philosophy, or mathematics, or any other science whatever, without a system? without regular laws, fixing the boundaries of the various particulars, and laying down principles for the government of the learner.

To impart sound and orthodox explanations of certain passages of Scripture, to pass under review all the difficult passages of the Bible, to guide the student to a thorough acquaintance with the original language in which the Bible was written, may all be well enough; but it is not teaching the science of exegesis. When scholars pass through just such a training, and then come to the actual duties of the sacred desk, they have the art of interpreting the Scriptures yet to learn. If a vigorous mind carry them forward to a thorough acquisition of this science, in its useful and practical form, it is well; they make useful, progressive, and faithful ministers of the glorious Gospel; if indifference in regard to

the matter take possession of them, they must lack one of the most effective qualifications of the sacred office. But it does stand to all reason, that, giving up, as they do, three whole years, to the work of fitting themselves to be expounders of the Bible, "workmen not needing to be ashamed," they should be called upon to look this science of interpretation directly in the face. It should be insisted on, that the acquisition of the original languages is merely preliminary, and in no sense a substitute for the study and acquisition of the axioms and laws, of a profound and fundamental hermeneutics.

Neither should students be permitted to suppose, that any degree of proficiency in the knowledge of languages, will be regarded as equivalent for the knowledge of this science. They should be held strictly to the fact, that it is a science, having all its axioms and laws, as determinate, and as sharply distinct, as those of any other science whatever. Even systematic divinity itself, however well understood, does not dispense with the logical pursuit and thorough acquisition of this science. Hermeneutics is the first, and altogether the most necessary of the sciences, connected with the Christian ministry; and no terms can be found, in which its importance can be properly set forth. On the soundness of the principles laid down as its fundamental laws,

depends, all the purity, consistency, and effectiveness of those expositions, which proceed from the pulpit; and our heart can pray for no greater blessing to our country and the world, than a wise, well-ordered, and Scriptural system of interpretation, inaugurated in our theological schools, and urged upon the awakened attention, of all candidates for the sacred office of the ministry. May divine wisdom be poured into the lips of our instructors, and grace from the eternal throne guide them, in the responsible duties which devolve upon them, as teachers of the mysteries of God, to those who go out from them, as the teachers of a wayward, and erring generation. Amen.

THE END.

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